The Sophomore Experience at the University of South Carolina
Findings from the 2011-2012 academic year

I. Definition:
a. First time, full time students who have progressed into their second academic year.

II. Quantitative Notes (findings based on the 2009 entering freshmen cohort)
a. During any given academic year, there are approximately 4,000 second-year students on the USC-Columbia campus
b. The current Sophomore to Junior year persistence rate is 79.6% (10 years prior this was a 73.8% persistence rate). Current First year to Sophomore retention rate is 85.95.
c. Academic Standing
   i. There is an association between academic standing and persistence into the third year of college.
   ii. A Chi-Square test was conducted to compare students’ academic standing at the end of the spring semester their sophomore year (USCGPA>=2.0, USCGPA<2.0) and whether or not they returned for their junior year. 193 sophomore students (5.79%) had a USCGPA less than 2.0 and 3,142 (94.21%) had a USCGPA higher than 2.0. Only 31% of students with less than a 2.0 returned for their junior year, while 96% with a 2.0 or higher did return.
d. Non-returners:
   i. At the end of the fall 2010 semester 42 students were academically suspended, 31% of this group (13 students) did return for their junior year, 69% did not (29 students)
   ii. 18 students were suspended at the end of the spring 2011 semester, they were unable to return until spring 2012, progress unknown to date.
   iii. At the end of the fall 2010 or spring 2011 semesters 105 sophomore students were placed on academic probation. 60% of this group (63 students) returned for their junior year, 40% did not (42 students).
e. Credit hour momentum – In an independent t-test to compare cumulative hours earned by the end of their sophomore year to return for the junior year, it was found that the more credit hours a student earns during their sophomore year the more likely a student is to return for their junior year. There is a statistically significant difference in the number of credit hours earned at the end of the sophomore Spring semester for those who did not return for their third year (M=52.257, SD=10.584) and those who did (M=60.124, SD=7.233); t(154)=-8.94, p<.0001. Generally students who do not return for their junior year are three classes behind the 60 hour mark of junior status.

III. Qualitative Findings
a. EDHE 839- Institutional Assessment had two class groups work with the Office of Student Engagement to conduct two studies on the sophomore population in spring 2012. One group focused on non-Capstone Scholars/ Honors College sophomores and the second group focused on Capstone Scholar sophomores.
b. A total of seven focus groups were conducted in mid-March, reaching 30 sophomore students.
c. General Findings
   i. The issues facing students in the sophomore year at USC in 2012 seem to be consistent with past findings from the last few years, which in turn align with national data.
      1. Academics. Students are moving into more academically demanding classes and trying to succeed in those classes.
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a. In addition, students may not always know the resources available to help them in this process.
b. For sophomores who are changing into a different academic major, there is a great concern about being “on track” and in line with the rest of their class.

2. Social Life and Extra-curricular activities. Students in their sophomore year appear to be focusing in more. Focusing on who their friend group is and focusing in on more specific clubs and organizations, rather than being involved in everything.

3. Time management, finances and balance continue to be an ongoing issue that sophomore students struggle with.

4. There seems to be an increased focus on the future and life after graduation. Students spent time talking about internships, taking the GRE, the process to get into grad school and everything they needed to be doing to have a profitable job after graduation.

d. USC-Specific Findings
i. Students were excited to hear that the University was interested in their experience and that they wanted to give attention to sophomores. Someone taking the time to hear them was appreciated.

ii. Parking on campus and coming back to campus (if living off) for events are very difficult and frustrating.

iii. Students who participated felt supported by Cross Campus Advising, University 101, ACE and the Capstone Scholars program (those participating)

iv. There was considerable frustration expressed with trying to utilize financial aid, student health center and VIP. Considerable discussion the “run-around” from various offices and difficulty getting correct information.

IV. Events
a. Snail Mail newsletter- sent to 3,981 rising sophomore students in July 2011
b. Email newsletter- sent monthly to sophomores- 3,981 in fall semester, 4,790 in the spring semester
c. Sophomore September Attendance
   i. Welcome Back Carnival- 447 students
   ii. Study Abroad Fair (hosted by Study Abroad)- 2,700 attended the fair, 102 specifically stopped by the TSI table
   iii. Snow Cone Cool Down- 447 students
   iv. Major and Information Fair- 430 students
   v. CareerFest (hosted by Career Center)- 619 students, approximately 100 identified as sophomores

V. Notes from Campus Partners
a. University Housing- 685 of sophomores lived in on-campus housing in 11-12
b. Cross Campus Advising- 646 sophomores visited CCA in the spring semester, making up 43% of the students who were seen.
c. ACE Coaching- TBD - ACE Tutoring- 459 sophomores visited ACE for general or math tutoring in 11-12, making up 28% of students who attended.
d. Study Abroad- 250 sophomores studied abroad in 10-11, making up 25% of students who studied abroad in 10-11 (2011-12 numbers are not available until July).
e. Undergraduate Research- 49 sophomores received funding to assist with undergraduate research, making up 25% of the students who received funding.