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## Should I stay or should I go?: A comparison study of cornerstone and non-cornerstone students' levels of campus engagement and institutional commitment

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Running Head: SOPHOMORE STUDENT COMMITMENT

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?:  
A COMPARISON STUDY OF CORNERSTONE AND NON-CORNERSTONE STUDENTS'  
LEVELS OF CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors with Distinction

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University of Northern Iowa  
May 2013

### **Introduction**

Many college sophomores experience a difficult transition between freshman and sophomore years. They begin to focus on major choices and career options and become more focused on major classes. Sophomore students are not normally given the same amount of attention or provided with as many resources by their institution as freshmen students, which makes choosing a major or career, and succeeding in harder classes more difficult.

The term “sophomore slump” was first used by Mervin Freedman in 1956 when he claimed that sophomores were the least satisfied of all college students in his article “The Passage Through College” (Freedman, 1956). Feldman and Newcomb (1969) also used this term to describe the lowering of student institutional commitment during the sophomore year of college, finding only two studies that dealt directly with this phenomenon. Baur (1965) found that the typical emotional problems of sophomore students were boredom and apathy. However, Feldman and Newcomb (1969) discovered that across many studies, sophomore slump refers to a student’s “dissatisfaction with the college as an institution and their experiences in it rather than in terms of inertia or disorganization” (p. 92).

Keniston and Helmreich (n.d.) found that sophomore students at Yale University were more cynical and less enthusiastic than freshmen students. Sophomores at Yale were also more likely than freshmen to agree that “students are treated like irresponsible children,” “teachers dislike spending time with students,” and “students feel alone and isolated” (as cited in Feldman & Newcomb, 1969, p. 92). More freshmen agreed with positive characteristics about Yale like “the administration treats the student as an adult,” and “students have a lot of contact with faculty” than sophomore students (as cited in Feldman & Newcomb, 1969, p.92). Students begin to notice flaws in the university they attend as sophomores that they may not have noticed as

freshman students. Sophomores have passed through the “honeymoon” phase of college and feel like the excitement of college has worn off, making the experience less satisfying for some students.

As a resident assistant last year, I lived on a floor with mostly sophomore students. I saw them struggle with many of the issues characteristic of the sophomore slump. They seemed to have questions about campus and resources but did not want to ask anyone for help. My residents also did not seem interested in being involved or engaged on campus. Several of my residents spoke about disliking UNI, and one student transferred at semester to another institution. While the sophomore slump characteristics did not apply to all of my sophomore residents, they fit many of them. I began to think more about my own sophomore year as I observed their behavior and realized I went through a small sophomore slump myself. I became more involved in some areas of campus but less involved in others. I did enjoy being at UNI but like the sophomore students in the Yale study also felt that professors did not care about me. Experiencing my own sophomore slump and then seeing that in my sophomore residents made me wonder why the experience I and many other sophomore students had was different from the experience of freshmen students.

After my sophomore year, I was a member of the summer orientation staff and learned about the First-Year Cornerstone class offered at UNI beginning in the 2011-2012 school year. This transition class would be part College Writing and Research and part Oral Communication, while offering freshmen students a unique opportunity to help with the transition from high school to college. I wondered if sophomore students who had taken the Cornerstone class as freshmen would be more engaged in the campus and have higher levels of institutional commitment than sophomore students who did not take the Cornerstone class as freshmen since

they had received support in this class over two semesters for succeeding in college and had established a learning community with their classmates and professor over this time period.

The purpose of this study is to discover if sophomores who took Cornerstone as freshmen are more committed to UNI and more engaged in the campus community than sophomores who did not take Cornerstone as freshmen. This work is important because it focuses on the role of a unique first-year experience course on sophomores, which as a group is more likely to leave the institution they are attending. The study helps in determining the effectiveness of the Cornerstone class in keeping students committed to UNI in their second year. It will also help with the development of ideas for ways to keep second-year students from experiencing the sophomore slump.

### **Review of Literature**

Many researchers have recently become more interested in issues related to sophomore student growth and development. This review of the literature covers the topics of sophomore slump and student persistence and belonging. The student persistence and belonging section addresses campus engagement, learning communities, and on-campus vs. off-campus living.

#### *Sophomore Slump*

Different articles about sophomores and their transitions provide different causes of sophomore slump. Freshman year has ended, and with it, so has the honeymoon period that most students experience with their university. Early on in their college, students tend to overlook any small flaws in their experience because they are still excited about being away from home and being in a new place (Miller, 2006). When the newness of college begins to fade in the second year, students start to notice the flaws they had overlooked in their freshman year. Sophomores also have high expectations of their institution in terms of feeling like they belong, having

approachable professors and administrators, and feeling safe and secure (Juillerat, 2000). When these expectations are not met, students are disappointed and feel let down by their institution. This can lead to students leaving the university after their sophomore year.

The pressures that start to build in the sophomore year also provide cause for the sophomore slump. Sara Lipke (2006) in “After the Freshman Bubble Pops,” said that sophomore students feel confused and anxious as they try to declare majors and make major life decisions about internships and careers. Sophomores must also begin taking “weed-out” classes in their majors. All of these factors contribute to the lack of engagement and institutional commitment from sophomore students. In his article, Caridad Sanchez-Leguinel agreed with Lipke about sophomores facing higher academic standards and a more intense curriculum (Sanchez-Leguinel, 2008). He also said that the programs universities gear toward freshmen tend to fall away as students become sophomores, leaving them feeling abandoned and ignored. Even if the number of available resources does not change for sophomore students, the amount of focus and attention given to freshmen can make sophomores feel left out. Most welcome week programming is geared toward new students, and sophomores who have just had a full year of attention given to them, may have a hard time coping with not being the center of attention anymore. This lack of attention from campus services offices, during a time when sophomores are facing many life decisions and challenges in their academics, can cause decreased institutional commitment and can even make students resent the university they attend. Academic rigor and the pressure of making major life decisions, coupled with the end of the honeymoon period of college, all contribute to what is called the sophomore slump.

Experiencing the sophomore slump has consequences for the student and the university. Students who seem to be experiencing a sophomore slump have lower grade point averages and

are more likely to leave the institution they are attending. The sophomore slump has been counted as a factor in the level of attrition of students from a university between their sophomore and junior years. In the book *Helping Sophomores Succeed*, Hunter, Tobolowsky and Gardner (2010) cited Berkner et al. (2002) as stating:

While first- to second-year retention is followed closely, there is less attention paid to retention beyond the first year. For students who intend to complete a four-year degree, at least as many students leave after the second year as do the first year. (16)

Students also experience a disengagement from social activities at the institution during their sophomore year (Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008). Social activities provide students with a way to meet their peers and feel connected to the campus community, and without these activities, they may feel lonely or disconnected. This social disengagement does seem to affect academic success because a lower GPA is common in sophomore student, and it does play a major role in the student's sense of belonging and his or her satisfaction with the institution (Sanchez-Leguelinel, 2008).

Knowing now that sophomore students are struggling to remain engaged and satisfied with their institution, many universities have begun second-year experience programs to focus on those students who may be experiencing the sophomore slump. Lipke (2006) wrote about the Sophomore-Year Experience program developed by Colgate University to help sophomore students feel more connected to each other and to the institution. The program is a yearlong program and focuses on helping sophomores answer the tough questions about academic majors and career options. These students may join book groups before the school year begins and then discuss those books with faculty members and fellow students when they return to campus.

Colgate University wants to send a sophomore-year message in all of their programming. Lipke (2006) stated, “That message is to see choosing a major, a study-abroad program, or a career path as a process of exploration and self-discovery rather than a source of stress” (p. 42). Small events like an informal reception featuring faculty from different majors who presented to students on opportunities in those majors help students to make decisions without feeling too much pressure to do so.

Other universities have also begun programs to combat the sophomore slump and increase sense of belonging in sophomore students. Universities focus on social events like dances, class trips, dinners, and other special events. Peer mentoring is common among universities to help students connect with one another and to give sophomores an outlet for discussing the things that are important to them. The peer mentors meet with the sophomore students to provide them with another person to use as a resource on campus. Peer mentors are typically juniors and seniors who have already experienced their sophomore year. Beloit College takes their sophomore students on a retreat to build relationships, and typically, half of the sophomore students attend. Lipke (2006) reported, “At Beloit, the graduation rate for the Class of 2004, the most recent data available, was 87 percent for students who had attended a sophomore-year retreat and 68 percent for those who had not” (p. 42). Several universities offer sophomore-seminar courses or other credit and non-credit courses for students. Austin College has a class specifically for sophomores that focuses on developing leadership skills (Lipke, 2006). As sophomores become juniors and seniors, those leadership skills will be important. At other institutions, the sophomore students help with the first-year courses either by serving as teaching assistants or by helping to teach the courses. All of the specialized programs geared



toward sophomores try to improve their experience and satisfaction and to keep them committed to the institution they attend.

### *Student Persistence & Belonging*

Two surveys dealing with student persistence and sense of belonging were used in developing the overall survey used in this study. The College Persistence Questionnaire was developed by Davidson, Beck, and Milligan in 2009. They reviewed the literature pertaining to student persistence, institutional commitment and retention, to find topics to focus on in the survey. Persistence is a measure of how likely a student is to continue attending a certain university. The survey focuses on six themes including “Institutional Commitment, Degree Commitment, Academic Integration, Social Integration, Support Services Satisfaction, and Academic Conscientiousness” asking questions about students’ experiences at the institution that lead to the formation of their opinion on persisting at their current institution (Davidson, Beck, & Milligan, 2009, p. 373). Davidson, Beck, and Milligan then tested the survey to determine its validity and reliability. Their findings showed that persistence is hard to determine because different students value different experiences and services at an institution. However, they were able to create a questionnaire to answer some of the questions revolving around student institutional commitment.

Another survey developed around the same time was a survey pertaining to a student’s sense of belonging at their institution. Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, and Woods published an article called “Sense of Belonging and Persistence in White and African American First-Year Students” in 2009 about this survey and the results they obtained from it. Hausmann et al. (2009) stated in their article, “We define students’ sense of belonging as their psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community” (p. 650). The authors believe that

feeling a sense of belonging is a precursor to the outcomes of increased institutional commitment and persistence. The study found that, “sense of belonging had a direct, positive effect on students’ institutional commitment, and significant indirect effects on intentions to persist and actual persistence” (Hausmann et al., 2009, p. 665). Sense of belonging is an important factor in determining whether students will stay at the institution or not.

There are several possible contributors to student persistence and belonging cited in the literature. Campus engagement, learning communities, and living on-campus have all been found to be related to likelihood of student persistence and belonging. These are covered briefly in the sections below.

*Campus engagement.* Campus engagement focuses on the level to which a student is active and involved on campus in their academics and in other ways. The National Survey of Student Engagement website (2012) says that student engagement has two parts. The first part is how much time and energy the student puts into working on their academics and other educational activities or student groups. The second part is how many resources and activities the university provides for the students and how the university markets their activities and events to get students to come to them.

Engagement usually refers to both academic and social engagement. Stebleton, Jensen, and Peter (2010) in the article “Enhancing Student Engagement in a Multidisciplinary First-Year Experience Course” define social engagement as “activities that occur outside of the classroom (e.g., meeting new friends, participating in student groups or learning activities, and time spent in online social networking activities)” (p. 1). Students’ levels of both academic and social engagement impacts their persistence in pursuing their degrees and their sense of belonging to the campus community.

First-year experience courses can help increase student engagement on campus. For example, the First-Year Cornerstone class at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) focuses on helping freshman students with the transition from high school to college. The outcomes of the course are to help students learn effective strategies for succeeding in college, to learn to communicate and work with others well, to understand varying viewpoints, and to understand their own viewpoints and interactions with others. The course is set up to provide students with ways to be engaged on campus and to have success at UNI. One section of the course is called Student Success Activities and Reflections. These activities help students “get off on the right foot at UNI” (Chatham-Carpenter, 2012, p. 2). A second category of assignments is called Campus Engagement Activities. Students are required to attend ten events on campus throughout the course of the semester. Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter (2012) gives this instruction in the syllabus for her Cornerstone course, “You should select at least one activity from each of the following categories, with the remaining ones being electives from which you may choose: Athletics, theatre, music, ALC or wellness workshops, guest speakers, and student organization meeting/events” (p. 2). These assignments provide students with new experiences, ways to meet new people, and ways to get involved on campus. They also focus on reflective learning. Students attend different events and then reflective on what they learned from those experiences. This gets students to think critically about the events they attend and how those experiences can help them in their time at UNI. Teaching students these strategies for success as freshmen may help them continue to stay engaged and feel like they belong at UNI.

*Learning communities.* Learning communities, such as that provided in UNI’s First-Year Cornerstone course, are commonly used at universities to engage students both with the university and each other. Pike, Kuh, and McCormick (2010) in the article “An investigation of

the contingent relationships between learning community participation and student engagement” define learning communities as, “In general, learning communities consist of a cohort of students who take two or more classes together” (p. 301). The article goes on to discuss that the learning community usually focuses on a particular topic and may or may not involve activities outside of the classes associated with the learning community.

Research shows that students involved in learning communities tend to have an easier time with the transition from high school to college. Students also have higher grades and are more likely to stay at their institution and to graduate from that institution (Pike et al., 2010). Perhaps learning communities help freshmen students not only with their transition from high school to college, but also the transition from freshman year to sophomore year, as the higher level of institutional commitment and persistence in those students would indicate. This study will analyze that possibility.

*On-campus vs. off-campus living.* Whether a student lives on-campus or off-campus can affect their level of campus engagement and their sense of belonging to the campus community. Living on-campus has been shown to have positive effects on students’ GPAs and persistence to complete a degree. LaNasa, Olsen, and Alleman (2007) stated, “Previous studies show positive associations and effects of campus residence on student involvement, overall satisfaction, degree attainment, and personal growth and development” (p. 943). Residence halls influence student development, especially in the area of psychosocial growth. Longerbeam, Inkelas, and Brower (2007) wrote an article that said, “Enhanced values development, tolerance, empathy, and self-esteem are all linked to residence hall living” (p. 20). Living on-campus provides more opportunities for making new friends and getting involved in student groups than living off-campus does. Residence halls also provide programming and events that give residents

structured ways to interact with their peers and with faculty members at the institution. This seems to be the reason that living on-campus positively affects so many areas of students' lives. While living on-campus may indirectly affect the sense of belonging and campus engagement of students, it still makes a large impact on students' experiences and involvement at the university.

In this study, I am particularly interested in how the experiences of students as first- and second-year students impact their likelihood of persistence from their second to third year of college. I want to explore the role of UNI's First-Year Cornerstone two-semester learning community, as well as on- vs. off-campus living, on a sophomore student's commitment to the institution, in order to increase the literature about how to effectively confront the "sophomore slump" for sophomore students.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions have been developed to discover more information about "sophomore slump" and the engagement and institutional commitment of Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone sophomore students. Specifically, I am asking:

RQ1: What is the difference in student institutional commitment between Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone sophomore students?

RQ2: Is there a difference in student institutional commitment between sophomore students who live off-campus vs. those who live on-campus?

RQ3: What is the relationship between campus engagement and student institutional commitment?

RQ4: What are the best predictors of student institutional commitment?

## Methodology

### *Participants*

A total of 442 sophomore students were recruited to participate in this study. Over 200 sophomores who took Cornerstone as freshman were asked to participate, along with over 200 sophomore students who did not take Cornerstone. A stratified random sample was used to find non-Cornerstone students who compared to the Cornerstone students who took Cornerstone in categories like percentage of males and females, ACT scores, and GPA by the Office of Institutional Research at the University of Northern Iowa. Of the students agreeing to participate in the survey, 15 respondents had taken Cornerstone and 83 had not taken Cornerstone. Demographic questions were asked in the survey and the responses are reported below to show data on the kinds of students who took the survey.

Most students who took the survey were full time students who began their college careers at UNI. The participants were between the ages of 19 and 20, and 20 of the participants were male, while 76 were female, with one participant preferring not to answer that question. Only one participant was an international student. Nine participants attended another four-year college or university before coming to UNI and 20 attended junior or community college at some point before choosing to attend UNI. It is likely that these students took classes at these other institutions while still in high school. One demographic question participants were asked to answer was what the highest level of education completed by either of their parents or those who raised them was. The responses to that question were as follows: one did not finish high school, fifteen earned a high school diploma or GED, six attended college but did not complete their degree, twelve completed an Associate's degree (AA, AS, etc.), forty-two completed a

Bachelor's degree (BA, BS, etc.), eighteen completed a Master's degree (MA, MS, etc.), and two completed a Doctoral or professional degree (PhD, JD, MD, etc.).

Two of the students who took the survey identified as Asian, four identified as Black or African American, three identified as Hispanic or Latino, one identified as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, two preferred not to respond, and 91 identified as white. When asked if they were members of a social fraternity or sorority, 86 responded no, while 12 responded yes. Eighty-one of the respondents currently live in a residence hall or other campus housing, eleven live in a house or apartment within walking distance of campus, and five live in a house or apartment farther than walking distance from campus. Seven did not live in the residence halls at UNI as freshmen, and ninety-one did live in the residence halls at UNI during their freshman year. The average GPA for students taking the survey was 3.32. The lowest GPA reported was a 2.0 and the highest GPA reported was a 4.0 on a 4.0 scale. Students from a variety of different majors participated in the survey. Forty-nine students reported majors in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, 11 reported majors in the College of Business Administration, 20 reported majors in the College of Education, and 19 reported majors in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

### *Procedures*

Students were recruited to participate in the survey through an email to a list serv created specifically for the purposes of this study with the emails of the 442 students recruited as participants. Three total emails were sent to students to recruit them to take the survey. All three of the scripts used in those emails are found in Appendix A. When students clicked on the link placed in the emails sent to them, they were taken to the survey where the IRB consent form was

the first thing they read. The consent form for the survey can be found in Appendix A. After reading the consent form, students then clicked the next button, which also stood to indicate that they had read and understood the consent form and were willing to participate in the survey.

### *Instrumentation*

I searched online until I could find a scale that would test student institutional commitment and one that would test student engagement. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) uses a survey with various questions to find levels of student engagement (NSSE, 2012). I used specific questions from the survey to measure different levels of student engagement. Questions 1, 7, 10, and 17 focus on the academic experience that students are having at their institution. These questions discuss both the academic skills the student should be learning in their classes and the preparations the student takes to be ready for each class they attend. Academic skills and academic success are important to student satisfaction and engagement. Question 14 asked about the interactions the student has had with other people at the university and how satisfied they were with those interactions, which relates to social integration and sense of belonging. To see how the institution is performing in areas that are important to students, I asked question 15 from the NSSE survey. Question 16 looks at how students spend their time during the week, which gave a good idea of how engaged they are on campus and in different activities. Questions 18 and 19 deal directly with student institutional commitment and student satisfaction with the university. The demographic questions at the end of the survey were also used. The questions to be analyzed are listed in Appendix B.

The College Persistence Questionnaire (CPQ) was used in its entirety to test for student persistence. This survey focuses on six themes that were mentioned earlier in the literature review. Researchers Davidson, Beck, and Milligan (2009) discovered these six themes through



surveying different college students. They found that these six areas were related to student persistence and institutional commitment. I will use all of the questions from this survey to get an overall score for student persistence and scores on each of the six dimensions of the scale. Davidson, Beck, and Milligan (2009) in their article “The College Persistence Questionnaire: Development and Validation of an Instrument That Predicts Student Attrition” state, “Validity was assessed by administering the questionnaire to a sample of first-semester freshmen and then using scale scores to predict whether these students return for their sophomore year” (p. 384). The logistical regression produced from the results of the Davidson et al. (2009) survey classified 66% of the participants correctly. The reliability of each one of the six sections is listed in the article with the highest being 0.82 and the lowest being 0.63. The lowest score comes from a section that only contains three items, and with more items, it would likely become more reliable. Questions will be answered on a five-point Likert response scale with a not applicable option. The items from the CPQ can be found in Appendix B.

In addition to the NSSE and CPQ questions, I used questions about faculty interactions, sense of belonging, institutional commitment, and goal commitment from the survey created by Hausmann et al (2009). These questions address areas of the student’s life that are not covered in either the NSSE survey or the College Persistence Questionnaire. This survey was the only one that addressed the question of a student’s sense of belonging to an institution, and because that term was mentioned several times in the literature, it was important to ask students how they felt about belonging to the institutional community. Like the CPQ, these questions will be answered on a five-point Likert response scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree), unless otherwise noted. The selected questions from the sense of belonging survey can be found in Appendix B.

*Analysis*

The data collected from the online survey was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and then the data were entered into the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis. The results from the questions pertaining to research questions one and two were analyzed using independent samples *t* tests. Independent samples *t* tests look for statistically significant differences between an independent variable with two levels (e.g., cornerstone vs. non-cornerstone students) on some dependent variable (e.g., persistence).

The results of the answers to survey questions pertaining to the third research question were used to find significant correlations between student institutional commitment and student engagement variables. I looked for possible relationships between continuous level variables like campus engagement measures, number of hours a student spends in a typical week being involved in student groups or organizations the student is actively involved with on campus, number of hours working in a typical week, and student institutional commitment. A multiple regression was performed to look for the best predictors of student institutional commitment to find an answer to the fourth research question. Several regression analyses were done on sections of questions that went together. The questions from the NSSE survey were run together in the regression. The significant predictors were found, and then all of them were run in a linear regression together.

**Results***Research Question 1*

*What is the difference in student institutional commitment between Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone sophomore students?* Table 1 below shows the descriptive statistics that correspond to RQ1.

Table 1

	Did you take UNI's First-Year Cornerstone course last year?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CPQ: Academic Integration	No	63	3.6488	.49639	.06254
	Yes	12	3.5521	.35137	.10143
CPQ: Social Integration	No	64	3.5898	.53752	.06719
	Yes	13	3.4423	.48038	.13323
CPQ: Support Services Satisfaction	No	65	3.4590	.59368	.07364
	Yes	13	3.3462	.68537	.19009
CPQ: Degree Commitment	No	33	4.3515	.53392	.09294
	Yes	4	3.9000	.34641	.17321
CPQ: Institutional Commitment	No	65	4.3500	.79156	.09818
	Yes	12	4.1458	.75723	.21859
CPQ: Academic Conscientiousness	No	66	4.3384	.72440	.08917
	Yes	12	4.5000	.54123	.15624
CPQ: Overall College Persistence Score	No	28	3.9077	.41096	.07766
	Yes	3	3.8032	.09199	.05311

An independent-samples  $t$  test was calculated comparing the mean scores on the areas of the CPQ and Overall College Persistence Score of participants who identified themselves as having taken the Cornerstone class to the mean scores on the areas of the CPQ and the Overall College Persistence Score of participants who identified themselves as not having taken the Cornerstone class. No significant difference was found in looking at the results for the  $t$  test for Overall College Persistence Score ( $t(14.716) = 1.111, p > .05$ ). The mean of the Cornerstone students ( $n=3$ ) for Overall College Persistence ( $m = 3.8032, sd = .09199$ ) was not significantly different from the mean of the Non-Cornerstone students ( $n=28$ ) for Overall College Persistence ( $m = 3.9077, sd = .41096$ ), with both groups reporting scores near to each other and both close to four. The score of four on this scale is out of five, with five being most likely to persist in college. A score of four is considered high and means that students are likely to persist at the university.

#### *Research Question 2*

*Is there a difference in student institutional commitment between sophomore students who live off-campus vs. those who live on-campus?*

Table 2

	Do you live off or on campus?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
CPQ: Academic Integration	on campus	64	3.6289	.49299	.06162
	off campus	11	3.6591	.37538	.11318
CPQ: Social Integration	on campus	66	3.5852	.52676	.06484
	off campus	11	3.4432	.54590	.16460
CPQ: Support Services Satisfaction	on campus	66	3.4268	.61611	.07584
	off campus	12	3.5139	.57057	.16471
CPQ: Degree Commitment	on campus	31	4.2581	.53961	.09692
	off campus	6	4.5333	.46762	.19090
CPQ: Institutional Commitment	on campus	65	4.4077	.70096	.08694
	off campus	12	3.8333	1.04628	.30203
CPQ: Academic Conscientiousness	on campus	67	4.3582	.71141	.08691
	off campus	11	4.3939	.64667	.19498
CPQ: Overall College Persistence Score	on campus	27	3.9356	.40110	.07719
	off campus	4	3.6410	.20092	.10046

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics that correspond with RQ2. An independent-samples  $t$  test was calculated comparing the mean scores on the areas of the CPQ and Overall College Persistence Score of participants who identified themselves as living on-campus during their sophomore year of college to the mean of those who identified themselves as living off-campus during their sophomore year of college. No significant difference was found in looking at the results for the  $t$  test for Overall College Persistence Score ( $t(29) = 1.428, p > .05$ ). The mean of the students who live on-campus ( $n=27$ ) during their sophomore year ( $m = 3.9356, sd = .40110$ ) was not significantly different from the mean of the students who live off-campus ( $n=4$ ) during their sophomore year ( $m = 3.6410, sd = .20092$ ), with both groups have similar levels of persistence.

### *Research Question 3*

*What is the relationship between campus engagement and student institutional commitment?*

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between participants' scores for Overall College Persistence and all questions from the National Student Engagement Survey and the Sense of Belonging Survey. Significant correlations were found between the Overall College Persistence score and scores for several of the other questions asked in the survey. A moderate negative correlation was found between Overall College Persistence and how often students prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in ( $r(29) = -.394, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Students who prepare two drafts or more of a paper more often score higher on the Overall College Persistence scale and are more likely to persist at their university. A moderate negative correlation was also found between Overall College Persistence and how often students attended an art exhibit, play, or other arts performance (dance, music, etc.) ( $r(29) = -.372, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationships between the two variables. Students who attend art exhibits, plays, or other arts performances more often score higher on the Overall College Persistence scale and are more likely to persist at their university.

Another moderate negative correlation was found between Overall College Persistence and how often students asked another student to help them understand course material ( $r(29) = -.387, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Students who ask other students for help in understanding course material more often score higher on the Overall College Persistence Scale and are more likely to persist at their university. A moderate negative correlation was found between Overall College Persistence and the number of hours a student spend working for pay off campus in a typical 7-day week ( $r(29) = -.364, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Students who spend more

time working off campus for pay in a typical 7-day week score lower on the Overall College Persistence scale and are less likely to persist at their university.

A moderate positive correlation was found between Overall College Persistence and how much the student feels that their experiences at the institution have contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in acquiring job-or-work-related knowledge and skills ( $r(28) = .555, p = .001$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Students who feel that their experiences at the institution have helped them acquire job-or-work-related knowledge and skills score higher on the Overall College Persistence scale and are more likely to persist at their institution. A moderate positive correlation was also found between Overall College Persistence and how much a student feels that their experiences at the institution have contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in understanding people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.) ( $r(29) = .531, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Participants who felt that the institution had given them experiences to understand people of other backgrounds scored higher on Overall College Persistence and are more likely to persist at their university.

A third moderate positive correlation was found between Overall College Persistence and how much students feel their experience at the institution has contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in being an informed and active citizen ( $r(29) = .361, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Students who felt that the institution had given them experiences to help them be informed and active citizens scored higher on Overall College Persistence and are more likely to persist at their university. A moderate positive correlation was found between Overall College Persistence and how

participants would evaluate their entire educational experience at the institution ( $r(29) = .638, p < .001$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Students who evaluate their educational experience higher scored higher on Overall College Persistence and are more likely to persist at their university.

The Overall College Persistence score of participants was also tested with the questions from the Sense of Belonging survey to look for any correlations. A moderate positive correlation was found between Overall College Persistence and how strongly a student agrees with the statement: I feel a sense of belonging to the University of Northern Iowa ( $r(28) = .365, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Participants who felt a strong sense of belonging to the University of Northern Iowa scored higher on Overall College Persistence and are more likely to persist at the university. A second moderate positive correlation was found between Overall College Persistence and how seriously a student has considered leaving the University of Northern Iowa ( $r(29) = .530, p < .05$ ), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Students who had not seriously considered leaving the University of Northern Iowa scored higher on Overall College Persistence and are more likely to persist at the university.

#### *Research Question 4*

*What are the best predictors of student institutional commitment?*

A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict participants' level of institutional commitment based on their answers to questions on the College Persistence Questionnaire and Sense of Belonging survey. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(3,25) = 17.627, p < 0.001$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .640, with three variables: Evaluation of entire educational experience, how much they feel they have acquired job-or-work-related knowledge and skills, and forming a

close personal relationship with at least one faculty member. Participants' predicted level of institutional commitment is equal to  $2.636 + .398$  (Evaluation of entire educational experience) +  $.174$  (How much they feel they have acquired job-or-work-related knowledge and skills) -  $.138$  (Forming a close personal relationship with at least one faculty member), where the answers for the evaluation of educational experience were coded as 1 = Excellent and 4 = Poor, the answers to the amount of acquiring job-or-work-related skills were coded as 1 = Very much and 4 = Very little, and the answers for forming a close personal relationship with a faculty member were coded 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree. All three questions included in the equation were significant predictors.

## Discussion

### *Research Question 1*

The statistical test performed showed that there was no statistically significant difference between Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone students in levels of campus engagement as measured by the College Persistence Questionnaire. This is important because it goes against the original belief of this thesis project which is that Cornerstone students will be more engaged on campus and more committed to the institution. Sanchez-Leguinel (2008) wrote that students experience a disengagement from social activities at the institution during their sophomore year. I thought that the Cornerstone class would counteract some of this because of the exposure the students of the class get to social activities and their value. Stebleton, Jensen, and Peter (2010) said that students' levels of both academic and social engagement impact their persistence in pursuing their degrees and their sense of belonging to the campus community. However, I recognize that since not all of the students answered all of the CPQ questions, I was only comparing a smaller sample of the people who took the survey (i.e., 28 non-cornerstone vs. 3 cornerstone students),



so I probably did not get an accurate look at this variable. Sanchez-Leguinel (2008) wrote that the programs universities gear toward freshmen tend to fall away as students become sophomores, leaving them feeling abandoned and ignored. This could be one of the reasons that Cornerstone students averaged slightly lower scores on the different areas of the CPQ survey. It could also explain why only a small number of Cornerstone students took the survey.

Cornerstone instructors can look to ease the transition at the end of the freshman year into the sophomore year for their students by providing them with the right contacts and resources.

Making students aware of the opportunities available to them and supporting them in the big decisions they have to make during their sophomore year.

According to the syllabus for the Cornerstone class at UNI, the outcomes of the course are to help students learn effective strategies for succeeding in college, to learn to communicate and work with others well, to understand varying viewpoints, and to understand their own viewpoints and interactions with others. These outcomes help students to learn how to interact with each other and help them to be successful in college. One of the parts of being successful in college is joining student organizations and becoming engaged in the campus community. Cornerstone provides students an opportunity to begin doing this and provides them a learning community to support them and help them grow. Students who are part of learning communities typically have higher grades and are more likely to stay at their institution and to graduate from that institution (Pike et al., 2010). Based on this research, I believed that the sophomore students who had taken Cornerstone would be more committed to the institution and more likely to persist on campus. Because of the small numbers of Cornerstone students in my sample, this is a question that still needs to be explored.

In looking at the descriptive statistics provided in Table 1 under Research Question 1 in the results section, the means for the two populations are reported on each of the categories on the CPQ. The overall College Persistence score is actually lower for Cornerstone than non-Cornerstone students, although the difference is not statistically significant. The means of the scores of Cornerstone and non-Cornerstone students on most of the categories of the College Persistence Questionnaire were close, typically within about a tenth of a point of each other. Even though the statistics were not significantly different, it is a good sign that the scores were generally in the high three to four range. The questions were measured on a scale of one to five, with five being the best. Means in the high three to four range indicate that the sophomore students who took the survey are well-integrated in the six categories tested by the College Persistence Questionnaire. This shows that UNI is doing a good job of serving students and helping them to be integrated with the university in a variety of areas of student life.

These results are also important in examining what the Cornerstone class does for students and if there are areas where it can improve. When considering these results, we also have to take into account if the students who take the Cornerstone class are students who might need more help than other students in transitioning to college. This could affect the way they answered the questions on the survey and could have affected the number of people who chose to participate in the survey. It could also make them less likely to persist at the university.

### *Research Question 2*

Similar to the results to Research Questions 1, the results for Research Question 2 were not statistically significant. The means for the six categories of the CPQ between the on campus and off campus students were within a few tenths of each other. In two important categories, Institutional Commitment and Overall College Persistence Score, the on campus mean was

higher than the off campus mean. This means students who live on campus as sophomores are more likely to be committed to the institution they are attended and are overall, more likely to persist at the university. This is consistent with the research current in the literature. LaNasa, Olsen, and Alleman (2007) said, "Previous studies show positive associations and effects of campus residence on student involvement, overall satisfaction, degree attainment, and personal growth and development" (p. 943). Residence halls provide both social and educational programming that can help students make new friends and can provide them with access to resources on campus. This can improve students' overall satisfaction with the university and their educational experience, which will make them want to persist at the university.

### *Research Question 3*

Several moderate and significant correlations existed between the Overall College Persistence score and questions from both the NSSE survey and the Sense of Belonging survey. Because of the way that the scales were set up for answering the questions the three negative correlations showed that being active in academics and the arts improves the score on the Overall College Persistence. Students who prepare two or more drafts of a paper, attend art events, plays, etc., and who ask other students for help with their school work are more likely to persist at the university and to complete their degrees at UNI. This is important when the student is looking at measures for retaining students. Funds can be used to continue to support the artistic events on campus that students can attend for free. Professors and other academic resources on campus can encourage students to work with one another on homework and papers and can also encourage them to write multiple drafts of papers before turning them in. Another moderate negative correlation was found between the hours students work at an off campus job and how engaged they are on campus. The more hours a student works off campus, the less engaged he or she is on

campus. This is incredibly important when considering retention efforts. Encouraging students to obtain on campus jobs and providing on campus jobs for all interested student could do a lot to keep students engaged and committed to the institution.

Several positive correlations were found between the Overall College Persistence score and questions from NSSE and the Sense of Belonging survey. How much students think their experiences at the institution have helped them acquire job-related skills affects how engaged students are on campus. This makes sense because at its core the university's goal is to help students acquire the skills that will make them successful citizens, and acquiring job-related skills is important for many students in helping them become successful citizens. Sara Lipke (2006) in "After the Freshman Bubble Pops," said that sophomore students feel confused and anxious as they try to declare majors and make major life decisions about internships and careers. Sophomores must also begin taking "weed-out" classes in their majors. Those who think they have gained many job-related skills and a greater understanding of those who are not like them are more engaged on campus and more likely to be committed to the institution. They are also likely to be less anxious as they make decisions about their careers and declaring majors.

Understanding people who come from different backgrounds is also important to students in becoming successful citizens of the world. As the world becomes smaller and careers become more global, students need to be able to relate to those who are different from them. Building these skills in and out of the classroom will help students be successful when they enter the working world. The previous two correlations tie in nicely to the positive correlation that also exists between students feeling like the university has helped them become active and engaged citizens and has increased their levels of on campus engagement. These three correlations all seem to be interrelated and show that the life skills provided at the university are important to

students. When students feel the institution is preparing them for their futures, they are more likely to be actively engaged on campus and more likely to be committed to completing their degrees at the institution.

The last positive correlation between questions from the NSSE survey and the CPQ was that students who rank their overall educational experience highly are more likely to persist at the university and are more likely to be engaged on campus. I expected this result because students who feel they are getting a high-quality education will want to continue getting that education at the university they are attending. The overall educational experience could also refer to activities and events outside of the classroom, so it also makes sense that students are more engaged on campus if they are also participating and attending these kinds of educational events.

The two positive correlations between the Sense of Belonging survey and the CPQ also seemed logical based on what the literature says about institutional commitment and the sense of belonging a student feels at a particular institution. Hausmann et al. (2009) wrote an article and said that they believe that feeling a sense of belonging is a precursor to the outcomes of increased institutional commitment and persistence. The study Hausmann et al. conducted found that, “sense of belonging had a direct, positive effect on students’ institutional commitment, and significant indirect effects on intentions to persist and actual persistence” (Hausmann et al., 2009, p. 665). Students who feel like they belong to the institutional are more likely to stay at the place where they belong. The other correlation was between how seriously students have considered leaving the University of Northern Iowa and their score on the CPQ. Because of the way this question was scored for answers, the positive correlation actually means that the more a student has thought about leaving the university, the less likely they are to persist at the

university. If a person has been seriously considering leaving the university, it is unlikely that they feel a sense of belonging at the institution.

#### *Research Question 4*

The three strongest predictors of college persistence were how the student rates their overall educational experience, how much students believe they are acquiring job-or-work-related skills, and if they have developed a close personal relationship outside of the classroom with at least one faculty member. The way students rate their overall education experience is the great factor in determining if they will persist at the university. Both their in class and out of class experiences are factors in how they rate their overall educational experience. Social activities and learning experiences are what keep students at UNI. Another strong predictor was how much students believe the university is providing them with job-or-work-related skills. A higher rating in this area makes a student more likely to persist at the university. These two predictors seem to be tied fairly closely together. The goal of the university is to make students well-rounded citizens while providing them with job-or-work-related skills to make them successful in the field they enter after graduation. If this is important to students and they feel like the university is accomplishing this goal, they are likely to also rate their overall educational experience highly.

A third strong predictor was if a student had formed one close, personal relationship with a faculty member outside of the classroom. This was the factor that intrigued me the most. Students want to feel like they can go to at least a professor for help on issues that may not be related to coursework. This is part of a student feeling like they belong at a certain institution. Cornerstone provides an opportunity for freshman students to form that close, personal relationship with a professor that they can maintain as sophomores and beyond. Cornerstone

classes are smaller than most other classes and continue for an entire year with the same group of students and the same professor. This provides students an opportunity to get to know each other and their professor on a deeper level than they may get to know the students and professors from their other classes that only meet for a semester and may be larger. As mentioned before, learning communities are important for new students and can help them succeed. Research shows that students involved in learning communities tend to have an easier time with the transition from high school to college. Students also have higher grades and are more likely to stay at their institution and to graduate from that institution (Pike et al., 2010). Cornerstone provides this opportunity for students. It would be interesting to find out where the non-cornerstone students are getting this as well.

### *Implications*

The results from this study provide some implications for the university. No significant difference existed between the Cornerstone students and non-Cornerstone students in the areas of integration measured by the CPQ. Those working with the Cornerstone class and its curriculum can use these results to find ways to continue to improve this class. Already changes have been made to the course to provide a better transitioning experience for freshmen students. Continuing to focus on the resources campus can provide to students and requiring students to attend activities outside of class will promote campus engagement and institutional commitment. I think focusing on the learning community aspect of the course is also important for it to be successful. Making sure students make personal connections with each other and with their professor can keep them engaged and make them feel a sense of belonging at UNI. Cornerstone instructors can also work on providing students strategies to deal with the possible “sophomore slump” they

may experience in their second year. Perhaps just knowing what resources are available to help them confront this would be helpful for students.

Living on campus keeps students engaged and more committed to the institution. This is important because the university can use this information to continue to encourage students to live on campus. University officials also know from this information that they may need to focus more on providing resources to off campus students to keep them engaged on campus and committed to completing their degrees at UNI. Several universities I visited when I was interviewing for graduate school positions had offices specifically designated to help off-campus students. UNI would benefit from an office like this because we do have a large population of students who live off-campus and may not be getting the resources or help they need. Providing them a specific office to go to with questions could improve their overall educational experience which is one of the biggest factors in keeping students engaged and committed to the institution.

The results of my study are important because they are strong indicators of what keeps students committed to the institution and engaged on campus. The University of Northern Iowa can use this information to create new programs or focus on improving old programs dedicated to the retention of students. Currently, UNI is actually doing very well as far as keeping students engaged and committed to the institution goes. The average CPQ score for sophomore students who participated in the survey was 3.8554 on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest choice and being equivalent to a high level of persistence and campus engagement. Making students feel like they belong and giving them experiences to make them well-rounded and successful citizens are key in keeping students engaged and committed to an institutional. Working off-campus can have a detrimental effect on students' levels of engagement and institutional commitment. Being able to keep all students from taking off campus jobs is unlikely and might



not be beneficial to all students, but providing students with a plethora of opportunities on campus and telling them about the benefits of on campus jobs may deter some students from working off campus.

The university can continue improving the education it offers and the events outside of the classroom that students can attend to learn, which will help students have a positive overall educational experience and help the university in their attempts to retain more students. Like I mentioned in the Literature Review, several universities provide programming specifically for sophomore students. Beloit College takes their sophomore students on a retreat to build relationships, and typically, half of the sophomore students attend. Lipke (2006) reported, “At Beloit, the graduation rate for the Class of 2004, the most recent data available, was 87 percent for students who had attended a sophomore-year retreat and 68 percent for those who had not” (p. 42). This shows the large impact sophomore focused programming can have on students. Other colleges have started sophomore experience programs. Lipke (2006) wrote about the Sophomore-Year Experience program developed by Colgate University to help sophomore students feel more connected to each other and to the institution. The program is a yearlong program and focuses on helping sophomores answer the tough questions about academic majors and career options. Colgate University wants to help their students make the difficult choices they face during their sophomore year and tries to make those experiences fun and exciting rather than scary and intimidating.

I had not seen anything in my research about the importance of faculty in student persistence. The results of this study show that faculty members play an important role in keeping students committed to the institution. The university can also work at providing more opportunities for students to get to know their professors in an informal setting. Other

universities provide events where sophomore students can interact with professors and get to know them better. Colgate University provides events like this as part of their Sophomore-Year Experience program. Small events like an informal reception featuring faculty from different majors who presented to students on opportunities in those majors help students to make decisions on majors without feeling too much pressure to do so and also help them to form relationships with faculty members who share their interests. Another part of the program is that students may join book groups before the school year begins and then discuss those books with faculty members and fellow students when they return to campus. This provides students another out-of-the-classroom event to connect with faculty members who could help them later when they look for jobs or internships.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

This study is limited because only fifteen Cornerstone students completed the survey which is not a large enough number of students to draw many conclusions from the results. It is difficult to compare the 83 non-Cornerstone students to the small population of Cornerstone students who took the survey. And when looking at the actual number of Cornerstone students who answered all of the CPQ questions, the number was even smaller.

These particular Cornerstone students were the first students to take the Cornerstone class, and as such, they have been surveyed frequently. This may have been a factor in the low number who took the survey. The Cornerstone program has also made improvements between last year and this year. I spoke to several students currently in the Cornerstone class and to a Peer Teaching Assistant for Cornerstone this year, and they all said that the class has been positive and is making an impact on the students taking it. The Peer Teaching Assistant in particular said that the course had improved between last year and this year and said that surveying the

freshmen currently in the Cornerstone class would probably provide different results from those recorded in this study. The study was also somewhat limited because most of the students who took the survey lived on campus last year and currently live on campus. That made it hard to compare on campus to off campus students in the results and made it impossible to look at the comparison of Cornerstone vs. Non-Cornerstone and on-campus vs. off-campus living.

In the future, more research could be done on the backgrounds of the students who take Cornerstone and the way the class impacts them from the beginning to the end of their freshmen year and then continuing on into their sophomore year as well. It would also be interesting to continue to survey the Cornerstone students throughout their years of college to see how committed they are to the institution, how engaged they are on campus, and how those levels may change as they continue to age. Surveying the current group of Cornerstone students and the following groups of Cornerstone students as sophomores may provide a lot of data to help determine the effectiveness of the Cornerstone course. As changes continue to be made to improve the course, surveys could show how those changes affect the campus engagement and institutional commitment levels of Cornerstone students. Distributing the same surveys to sophomores from other institutions who took first year experience courses to see if these same kinds of results would be produced at another university would be intriguing as well. That would be a good way to see if the correlations here are universal across this age-group of students or if the things valued by University of Northern Iowa students differ from other students in the country.

### **Conclusion**

My own experiences as a sophomore student were what made me initially interested in this topic. The literature supported my thoughts about the sophomore slump and what students

go through during their sophomore year. As a sophomore, I was less engaged on campus and less pleased with my overall experience at UNI. The results of this survey support the things that I felt were useful in keeping me committed to UNI. I formed a couple of relationships with professors outside of the classroom during my freshman year, and I was able to rely on those professors when my sophomore year became difficult. I know my experiences in and out of the classroom at UNI have provided me with job-related skills and have helped me to understand people from other backgrounds, which the study found were important in students staying committed to the university.

After graduation, I plan to attend Kansas State University to obtain my Master's degree in College Student Development. The results of this study will help me as a professional in the field of student affairs. When working with sophomore students, I will be able to refer to the results of this study and will know how to help those students be engaged on campus and committed to their institution. I can give them suggestions on getting involved in clubs and finding ways to create relationships with professors outside of the classroom. The results presented in this thesis could be useful to many professionals in the field of student affairs who work with sophomore students. Universities often focus on the retention rates of their freshman students, but they also need to focus on the retention of their sophomore students. Students who experience a sophomore slump like I did are likely to leave the institution. Being able to provide those students with the resources and experiences they need to feel a sense of belonging to their university could help to retain those students. This thesis has added to the literature regarding first-year experience courses and their impact on sophomore students, and it has provided the University of Northern Iowa as well as other universities across the nation with some areas to focus on when trying to keep students engaged and committed to the institution. I will be able to

use these same results as I move into the field of student affairs and continue to work with students.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Recruitment Script Sent To Participants Via Email:**

Hi, my name is Theresa Luensmann, and I am conducting research as part of an Honors thesis project. You are being invited to participate in an online survey about your experiences since coming to UNI. This survey will take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to complete, and your answers will be compiled along with all other students' answers, so that your identity and answers will be kept anonymous. If you're interested in participating in this survey, please click on the following link to find out more about the study. [link will be put here]

### **1<sup>st</sup> Reminder Recruitment Script Sent To Participants Via Email:**

A week ago I sent you an email asking you to participate in my Honors thesis project about the experiences of sophomores at UNI. If you haven't yet responded and still would like to participate, please click on the following link. The survey will take you about 10-15 minutes to complete.

### **Last Reminder Recruitment Script Sent To Participants Via Email:**

LAST CALL! A couple of weeks ago I sent you an email asking you to participate in my Honors thesis project about the experiences of sophomores at UNI. If you haven't yet responded and still would like to participate, please click on the following link. The survey will take you about 10-15 minutes to complete. Thanks for helping me out!



**Electronic Display Consent Form:**

The Honors program at the University of Northern Iowa requires all Honors students to complete an Honors Thesis project before graduating. For my thesis project, I am collecting data about the experiences of sophomore students at UNI. I am interested in what experiences in classes and co-curricular activities that have influenced your views of UNI. You must be at least 18 years of age to take this survey.

Although you will receive no direct benefits from participation in the study, the results obtained may offer a better understanding of how first-year classes and co-curricular experiences affect the levels of campus engagement and commitment of sophomore students. Because the survey is anonymous, I will not know who completes or does not complete the survey. All of the survey data will be summarized together, without looking at any one person's survey results. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used, but no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent electronically. I will only be using the data to complete the required research for my Honors thesis.

Besides the approximate 10 – 15 minutes it would take you to complete the survey, there are no perceived risks from participating in this study, although the questions may make you think about the experiences you have had in your freshman and sophomore years at UNI more than usual. If, however, at any time you become uncomfortable answering the survey questions, you may discontinue your participation in the study, or you may submit only selected answers to the questions. Your participation is voluntary.

If you have any questions about this research or about your rights as a research participant, you may feel free to contact me, Theresa Luensmann, directly at [luensmat@uni.edu](mailto:luensmat@uni.edu) , my thesis advisor, Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter at [chatham@uni.edu](mailto:chatham@uni.edu) , or the University of Northern Iowa's Institutional Review Board Office at 319-273-6148.

Thanks for taking the time to fill out the survey below. By completing the survey, you are agreeing to participate in the research and acknowledge that you are 18 years of age or older. Make sure to hit the "submit" button at the bottom of the survey when you are finished.

**Appendix B**

*Questions from NSSE survey:*

1. During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?  
(Response options: Very often, often, sometimes, never)
  - a. Asked questions or contributed to course discussions in other ways
  - b. Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in
  - c. Come to class without completing readings or assignments
  - d. Attended an art exhibit, play or other arts performance (dance, music, etc.)
  - e. Asked another student to help you understand course material
  - f. Explained course material to one or more students
  - g. Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students
  - h. Worked with other students on course projects or assignments
  - i. Gave a course presentation
  
2. In a typical 7-day week, about how many hours do you spend *reading* for your courses?  
(Response options: 0 hours, 1-5 hours, 6-10 hours, 11-15 hours, 16-20 hours, More than 20 hours)
  
3. Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution.  
(Response options: 1=Poor to 7=Excellent, Not Applicable)
  - a. Students
  - b. Academic advisors
  - c. Faculty
  - d. Student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.)
  - e. Other administrative offices (registrar, financial aid, etc.)
  
4. About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing the following?  
(Response options: 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, More than 30 Hours per week)
  - a. Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)
  - b. Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)
  - c. Working for pay on campus
  - d. Working for pay off campus
  - e. Doing community service or volunteer work

- f. Relaxing and socializing (time with friends, video games, TV or videos, keeping up with friends online, etc.)
  - g. Providing care for dependents (children, parents, etc.)
  - h. Commuting to campus (driving, walking, etc.)
5. How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?  
(Response option: Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little)
  - a. Writing clearly and effectively
  - b. Speaking clearly and effectively
  - c. Thinking critically and analytically
  - d. Analyzing numerical and statistical information
  - e. Acquiring job-or work-related knowledge and skills
  - f. Working effectively with others
  - g. Developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics
  - h. Understanding people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.)
  - i. Solving complex real-world problems
  - j. Being an informed and active citizen
6. How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?  
(Response options: Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor)
7. Thinking about this current academic term, are you a full-time student?  
(Response options: Yes, No)
8. How many credit hours are you taking this current academic term?  
(Response options: less than 12 hours, 12 – 15 hours, 16 – 18 hours, more than 18 hours)
- 10a. How many majors do you plan to complete? (Do not count minors.)  
(Response options: One, More than one)
- 10b. [If answered “One”] Please enter your major or expected major: [Text box]  
[If answered “More than one”] Please enter up to two majors or expected majors (do not enter minors): [Text boxes]
11. What is your GPA?  
(Response options: [Text box])
12. Did you begin college at this institution or elsewhere?  
(Response options: Started here, Started elsewhere)
13. Since graduating from high school, which of the following types of schools have you attended other than the one you are now attending? (Select all that apply.)

(Response options: Vocational or technical school, Community of junior college, 4-year college or university other than this one, None, Other)

14. What is the highest level of education completed by either of your parents (or those who raised you)?

(Response options: Did not finish high school, High school diploma or G.E.D., Attended college but did not complete degree, Associate's degree (A.A., A.S., etc.), Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.), Master's degree (M.A., M.S., etc.), Doctoral or professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc.)

15. What is your gender?

(Response options: Male, Female)

16. Enter your year of birth: 19\_\_\_\_\_

17. Are you an international student or foreign national?

(Response options: Yes, No)

18. What is your racial or ethnic identification? (Select all that apply.)

(Response options: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, Other, I prefer not to respond)

19. Are you a member of a social fraternity or sorority?

(Response options: Yes, No)

23a. Which of the following best describes where you are currently living?

(Response options: Residence Hall or other campus housing (not fraternity or sorority house), Fraternity or sorority house, Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within walking distance to the institution, Residence (house, apartment, etc.) farther than walking distance to the institution, None of the above)

23b. Did you live in the residence halls at UNI during your freshman year?

(Response options: Yes, No)

*Questions from the College Persistence Questionnaire:*

Questions will be answered on a 5-point Likert scale, with a sixth option, *not applicable*, for students who feel that the question does not apply to them. Labels for the response scales depend

on the wording of the question. For example if the question asks, “How likely is it that you will earn a degree from here,” the answers range from *very likely to very unlikely*.

### Academic Integration

1. How well do you understand the thinking of your instructors when they lecture or ask students to answer questions in class?
2. How satisfied are you with the extent of your intellectual growth and interest in ideas since coming here?
3. In general, how satisfied are you with the quality of instruction you are receiving here?
4. How concerned about your intellectual growth are the faculty here?
5. On average across all your courses, how interested are you in the things that are being said during class discussions?
6. How much of a connection do you see between what you are learning here and your future career possibilities?
7. I believe that many instructors deliberately impose unreasonable requirements on students and enjoy their distress.
8. Students differ widely in how much interaction they want to have with faculty. How disappointed are you in the amount of interaction you have?

### Social Integration

1. How much have your interpersonal relationships with other students had an impact on your personal growth, attitudes, and values?
2. How much have your interpersonal relationships with other students had an impact on your intellectual growth and interest in ideas?
3. How strong is your sense of connectedness with other faculty, students, staff on this campus?
4. How much do you think you have in common with other students here?
5. When you think about your overall social life here friendships, college organizations, extracurricular activities, and so on, how satisfied are you with yours?
6. How many of your closest friends are here in college with you rather than elsewhere such as other colleges, work, or hometown?
7. What is your overall impression of the other students here?
8. How often do you wear clothing with this college’s emblems?

Supportive Services Satisfaction

1. How satisfied are you with the academic advisement you receive here?
2. How well does this institution communicate important information to students such as academic rules, degree requirements, individual course requirements, campus news and events, extracurricular activities, tuition costs, and financial aid and scholarship opportunities?
3. How easy is it to get answers to your questions about things related to your education here?
4. How much input do you think you can have on matters such as course offerings, rules and regulations, and registration procedures?
5. If you have needs that are different from the majority of students here, how well does this university meet these needs?
6. How fairly do you think students are handled here?

Degree Commitment

1. When you think of the people who mean the most to you (friends and family), how disappointed do you think they would be if you quit school?
2. At this moment in time, how certain are you that you will earn a college degree?
3. At this moment in time, how strong would you say your commitment is to earning a college degree, here or elsewhere?
4. How strong is your intention to persist in your pursuit of the degree, here or elsewhere?
5. How supportive is your family of your pursuit of a college degree, in terms of their encouragement and expectations?

Institutional Commitment

1. How likely is it that you will earn a degree from here?
2. How confident are you that this is the right university for you?
3. How likely is it that you will reenroll here next semester?
4. How much thought have you given to stopping your education here perhaps transferring to another college, going to work, or leaving for other reasons?

Academic Conscientiousness

1. How often do you miss class for reasons other than illness or participation in school-sponsored activities?

2. How often do you turn in assignments past the due date?
3. I am disinterested in academic work and do as little as possible.

*Questions from Sense of Belonging survey:*

Questions 1-10 use a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

1. My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes
2. My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations
3. I am satisfied with opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty members
4. Since coming to this university I have developed a close personal relationship with at least one faculty member
5. I feel a sense of belonging to the University of Northern Iowa
6. I feel that I am a member of the University of Northern Iowa community
7. I see myself as part of the University of Northern Iowa community
8. I am confident I made the right decision to attend the University of Northern Iowa
9. It is important for me to graduate from college
10. I intend to complete my degree at the University of Northern Iowa
11. Have you ever seriously considered leaving the University of Northern Iowa (1 = Yes, often, 2 = Yes, sometimes, 3 = Hardly ever, 4 = No, never)