Welcome Back!

I hope you had a wonderful summer and are ready to experience new directions on your journey. I speak for all of us in the Division of Student Life when I say that I am glad you have returned for your sophomore year at Carleton. This webpage is one of several changes we made this year to help keep you informed and to introduce you to our Sophomore Year Experience Program.

To introduce you to some of the reasons we have initiated this program, please let me share part of a conversation I had with a rising senior early this summer. The conversation started with the simple question about how her year had gone. She said it was much better than her sophomore year. So, being inquisitive, I asked her to elaborate.

She said the sophomore year was not what she had expected. She thought some of the excitement and energy of her first year would directly transfer to her sophomore year, but it didn’t. She said that while the year started well – catching up with friends, etc. – there were events that happened and things she felt, that made the year more challenging than she had wanted. As our conversation continued we talked about things both she and the College could have done to make her sophomore year experience better. This newsletter, the changes in the class dean system, and the committees that will help me as your class dean are part of the initiatives we have begun to help you during your sophomore year experience.

As we concluded our conversation, I asked her to summarize the good and bad of her sophomore year. She said, “Without experiencing the things I did, I wouldn’t have been able to trust the decisions I made this year.”

Sophomore Year – The Year of Choices & The Year of the “Slump”

Choices to Make

Last year at this time you were preparing to begin your journey at Carleton. You probably had many more questions than answers about what life on campus would really be like. This year you have more knowledge about Carleton, the workload, the people, and the ways of life. Hopefully, you also know more about yourself. That self knowledge will be helpful as you choose how to proceed with your life because you will have some important decisions to make this year. Among these important decisions will be:

- choosing your major;
- whether or not to participate in an off campus studies program and, if so, where and when to go;
- the papers to use for your writing portfolio.
As you start this new year at Carleton you also have the opportunity to decide how to make this year different from last year. What activities will you continue and what new ones do you want to try? How are you going to balance your time with:

- academics,
- organizations,
- work study,
- friends from last year,
- new people who live near you this year.

No matter what you decide with these questions, one of the keys to a positive and successful sophomore year is to choose to get involved with what is happening on campus. Carleton succeeds because students recognize that everyone has an obligation to help make the College an active and involved place.

You also have the choice to dream dreams and then take the first steps to help them come true. So, please take some time just for you so you can think about issues in life that are important to you.

It is by making choices like these that you will learn to be autonomous, more self-sufficient, and confident. Making decisions alone as well as with the help of friends will help you develop your own voice, become who you want to be, and begin to understand the importance of being interdependent.

The Sophomore Slump – What is it?

The path through college is not always smooth every step of the way. Some of the more noticeable bumps seem to happen during the sophomore year. In fact, this pattern of bumps is so noticeable they have been given a name, the sophomore slump.

Conversations with Carleton sophomores, as well as national research, show that a significant percentage of sophomores experience a lack of focus, a low level of commitment and an increased questioning of the value of what they are doing. Students in the second year of college tend to be trying to get a handle on being truly independent and establishing an identity that is consistent with their beliefs and values. Many second year students feel angst inside from trying to choose a path for their lives while feeling they lack sufficient information to make the decision. So, while they tend to want to make independent decisions, they also want to ask advice from those they trust.

Some of the common characteristics of this phenomenon are feeling less motivated, lacking direction, having difficulty making decisions, feeling burned out on school, and feeling distance developing in friendships. Students report feeling isolated, adrift, and indecisive. They are, at times, frustrated and disappointed with their courses because they don’t seem to relate to their goals or, in some cases don’t seem to relate to anything of interest. Sophomores want to get into their major courses because they think they will
be more interesting, yet it seems difficult to choose a major and make the commitment to one primary course of study that has the potential to become a path for life.

Other characteristics may include:
- Inappropriate decision making – academically and socially
- Dysfunctional behaviors (i.e. excessive drinking)
- Increased class absences
- Lack of co-curricular involvement
- Feel things are always the same/too routine
- Feel like they are in “neutral” - wanting to slow down, but also feel in a hurry to finish college
- Academics seem more difficult than expected
- Feel invisible
- Feeling they want to get away from academia

These feelings are exacerbated by life issues that are commonly experienced by sophomores. Some writers refer to this as a time of existential crisis. Many sophomores find themselves asking: What am I capable of doing? Who am I? What am I doing? Does college matter? Do I matter? What is the purpose of life? These are questions that are asked throughout life, but they seem to be asked fairly frequently by sophomores.

We are sharing this information so that if you are feeling any of the issues mentioned above you will know that you are not alone. We intend to offer information and activities that will help you address these issues as well as offer time to meet with you individually.

**Ideas for navigating your sophomore year**

This will be a regular feature in all the newsletters this year so I will only mention a few things this time.

As mentioned above, not everyone experiences a slump during their sophomore year, but all of you will have choices to make that will affect your academic, social, and personal success and happiness this year. One of our goals is to provide information and experiences that will assist you in making the best decisions you can.

For this first newsletter, I asked a small group of juniors for some suggestions they would have liked to receive as they started their sophomore year. Below are a few of their ideas.

“Laugh.”
“Get to know your professors.”
“Believe in yourself.”
“Take time to answer some of the questions you are always asking yourself.”
“When thinking about a major, really think about what interests you.”
“Don’t just study, this is Carleton, find other things to do like Ebony, IM’s, work with ACT, or go to the Rec. Center … just try something.”
**Class Dean Changes**

The Dean of Students Office has changed the class dean system. For the past 15 years a student’s class dean has been the same dean all four years. Beginning this year we will now have a dean dedicated to each class year. In this new system the class deans are:

- **First Year** – Joe Baggot
- **Sophomore** – Bucky Zietz
- **Junior** – Cathy Carlson
- **Senior** – Bruce Colwell

We made this change for several reasons, but for the sake of brevity, I will mention just one. Each class dean will now be responsible to help identify and understand the class’s shared experiences, issues and needs. Using that knowledge we are to take the lead in providing the resources and programs to assist you in living through the experiences and dealing with issues as they affect you.

**Your Class Dean – An Introduction**

Since this is the inaugural newsletter for your sophomore year, please allow me to introduce myself. I first worked at Carleton in the mid 1970’s and returned during the 2000 – 1 academic year as the Director of Residential Life. Two years ago my duties switched to being Associate Dean of Students. In addition to being your class dean, I am also responsible for overseeing Residential Life, Campus Activities, and ACT. In between my leaving and returning to Carleton, I traveled throughout Europe, served as a Vice President for Student Life at a different university, owned and operated a consulting firm, coached skiing in both the Midwest and Rocky Mountains, and served as general manager of a ski resort.

**Why did you use a pile of rocks in the logo?**

Have you ever been lost while driving somewhere or walking in the mountains or while working on a computer program or game? In the middle of being lost, did you ever come across a familiar sight – one that helped you orient yourself?

We have learned that many sophomores feel “lost” at various times throughout the year. Additionally, we have been able to identify some of the more common issues that tend to cause sophomores to feel this way. To help you with these issues we will offer various events such as workshops and meals with faculty members as well as regular newsletters. To help you quickly identify these events as being for you, all advertising for them will display our logo. The logo is not just a pile of rocks, it is a “cairn,” (pronounced: “care” with an “n” at the end). A cairn is what hikers place along trails to mark the way to guide them should they return and let others know someone has come this way before.