



It's Sophomore Year: Am I the Only One Who...? Things Sophomores Imagine No One Else Is Thinking and Feeling (But Many Students Are!)

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Sophomore slump! Is it real? One's college years are filled with developments and shifts. But what's *so* special about those second-year changes that warrants coining the phrase "sophomore slump"? The experiences that follow seem particularly salient for sophomores, though of course they can also arise at other times in college:

1. **"Everything isn't new any more."** "Sophomore slump" often refers to the feeling of loss one experiences after the newness – the excitement – of being at college has worn off. Though sophomore year brings the advantage of familiarity – you know your way around campus, you know the meaning of most of the Harvard acronyms, you know what to expect during "shopping period" – that loss of newness and increased familiarity can also be a letdown. You might miss the thrill of starting so many new things.

Things to consider trying: Recognize that with just about *any* significant new experience, one's excitement eventually diminishes over time. While it's understandable to feel a bit let down by this, remember that there are a wealth of advantages and opportunities that accompany experience and familiarity. Think about all you learned last year and how that knowledge has laid a foundation for the coming year. Now look ahead towards the things you're looking forward to this year. Make a list of the familiar things that you hope to continue to have in your life, as well as goals for what you want to accomplish as a sophomore. Such goals might include meeting new people, investigating some aspect of Harvard that interests you, going to a particular activity on campus, visiting Boston to explore the city, etc.

2. **"Where are all my friends?"** Living together in or near Harvard Yard provides freshmen at Harvard with a unique first-year experience. When sophomore year begins, your friends from last year might reside much farther away. Therefore, as a sophomore, it might take more effort to continue to see your friends, because you can no longer rely upon those casual encounters that occurred more frequently during your first year on campus.

Things to consider trying: Resist the idea that all social interactions should be spontaneous. Make plans with friends for lunch and dinner. Find a time to meet for coffee or to study with one of your friends in the library. Meet new people in your House by sitting with someone new at dinner, by inviting someone in your hallway to watch a movie with you, or by participating in a House activity.

3. **"I thought my roommates were just right last year (or my roommates would be perfect this year), but it's not working out so well right now."** In the transition from freshmen year to sophomore year, you and/or your friends might change in ways that make it surprisingly difficult to maintain good relationships.

Things to consider trying: As uncomfortable as it might be, try talking with them directly. Sometimes airing everyone's concerns can help shift the tone in the room. Consider enlisting assistance for this conversation: Resident tutors can be helpful, and Bureau academic counselors frequently facilitate roommate conversations. Having a neutral party facilitate the dialogue can help to create a safe and productive climate to resolve your differences. Also consider expanding your network of friends so that you don't have to rely primarily on your roommates.

4. **"I'm anxious about the possibility of joining a social club (e.g., final club, sorority, fraternity)."** Fall semester of sophomore year is the most common time for Harvard students to solicit and receive offers to join social clubs. For some Harvard students, this can be a very stressful experience, and it can feel difficult or awkward to discuss. In addition to being time-consuming, the process might involve engaging in behaviors and forming relationships that are way outside your comfort zone. It is also quite common for students to feel rejected or ashamed in a deeply personal way as part of this process.

Things to consider trying: Remind yourself that the majority of Harvard students lead perfectly satisfying, emotionally secure lives without ever being part of a social club. Recognize that your true friends will continue to associate with you regardless of whether you are in a social club. Know that many students who are in social clubs are ambivalent about their experiences and participation.

5. **“I have no idea what to choose for a concentration!!”** Last year you might have thought you were positive that “Concentration X” was the perfect fit for you, but now you’re not so sure. Or, maybe no single concentration ever felt quite right. Regardless of how you arrived in this place, choosing your concentration can be challenging and fraught with anxiety. You’re likely to be weighing factors such as what you like the most, what comes naturally to you, what might position you best for your post-graduation career or graduate school, etc.

Things to consider trying: Make good use of your sophomore advisor in your House. Attend advising events sponsored by the APO and your House. Reach out to a favorite teacher, your freshman advisor, your proctor, or your PAFs to reflect on your options. Meet with department-specific concentration advisors or administrators. Speak with juniors or seniors in particular concentrations. Make an appointment with a Bureau academic counselor to consider your choices. Also, try to trust yourself and your choices. Give yourself the chance just to notice your ambivalence and all the complicated reasons for potentially choosing one concentration over another. Is it due to external expectations? Fear of making the “wrong” choice? Not being sure what you might be good at? The more you understand about your own misgivings and wishes, the easier it will be to make a decision. And remember, for most Harvard students, no one “perfect” concentration exists to suit all of their needs.

6. **“Last year, I loved most of my classes. But now, I don’t feel very engaged in them.”** This is a moment to be curious about what has left you disengaged and what it is that seems to interest those who do find the course or subject matter engaging.

Things to consider trying: Sometimes a personal connection with teachers can make a big difference in one’s classroom experience. If you’re finding your academic life okay, but a little dull, then consider meeting with one of your teachers to try to get excited by the course material. You don’t need an academic reason to see a professor or TF. One way of starting a conversation can be to ask about the person’s own interest in the topic.

7. **“As a freshman, my classes didn’t seem hard. I had good grades, and although I worked hard, it didn’t feel all that difficult. But this year, I’m working even harder, and my grades aren’t as good. What’s happening???”** In certain cases, sophomore-level courses *are* more difficult and require more effort. But it’s important to consider that your courses this year might require a *different* kind of effort than last year’s courses required. You might not necessarily just need to spend more *time* studying. Rather, you might need to be more *strategic* about your studying. It’s surely not the case that you somehow became innately less able to do the work when you transitioned from freshman to sophomore year.

Things to consider trying: Sophomore year is an excellent time to evaluate your study skills. Many students come to Harvard without ever needing to think about their study habits and skills. That’s because for high school work, and sometimes even for first-year work at Harvard, one’s tried-and-true study habits remain effective. But your second year at Harvard might bring with it your first encounter with the limitations of those previous ways of working. Those tried-and-true study habits and skills might no longer suffice. The Bureau website, <http://bsc.harvard.edu>, has links to many online study resources. We also invite you to visit our office at 5 Linden Street, where you can check out the Cranium Corner (a variety of study skills handouts), you can make an individual appointment with a Bureau academic counselor to think more about your strengths and the challenges you’re currently encountering, and you can sign up for peer tutoring. In addition, you might want to talk with your TF or professor about suggestions to boost your performance in a particular course.

8. **“I loved my extracurriculars last year, but this year the same ones aren’t quite as fun.”** While you might feel that your extracurriculars are no longer as enjoyable or meaningful as they once were, you might also be thinking, “I didn’t get involved in enough activities last year. Is it too late to get involved now?” or “I felt overcommitted last year because I was involved in too many things.”

Things to consider trying: Keep an open mind. It’s always good to evaluate the use of your time and to focus on the activities that matter most to you. Try prioritizing all your interests and activities to see whether a few of them stand out as particularly compelling. Remind yourself that it is never too late to explore or cultivate a new interest. An integral part of student life throughout college is finding the activities that are most interesting to you. Students sometimes find new interests by joining a friend in one of theirs or keeping an open mind when perusing the Activities Fair. Another part of the process is to pay attention to your own experience. For instance, notice when you’re feeling particularly engaged and enlivened by your endeavor or experience versus when you’re feeling disconnected, bored, or unmotivated. These observations provide clues about patterns and themes across your preferences. And always remember that you don’t *have* to do everything. Learning to say “no” is a crucial part of leading a balanced, satisfying life.

Bureau of Study Counsel academic counselors are available to consult with you about any of these topics or other things that might be on your mind. Call 617-495-2581 or stop by at 5 Linden Street to find a time to meet with someone.

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