

## Promoting At-Promise Student Success

### Overwhelmed Senior Navigates External Pressures

**Purpose:** This vignette highlights how institutions focus resources on first- and second-year students, often leaving fourth-year students to figure out how to navigate important decisions on their own.

**Student Vignette:** Stephanie is a 22-year-old fourth-year business major in her final year of college. She is juggling a heavy course load of 18 credits at the start of the fall semester. She also is a member of two student clubs, one of which she is an executive board member for the service-oriented group on campus. Her academic advisor encouraged her to take extra classes in the fall and spring so that she could graduate in the spring, and her parents have strongly urged her to finish within four years. Her sister had brought in several dual enrollment credits and completed the honors program in four years. Stephanie shares how her sister “is the smart one in the family” and has always been an overachiever. Stephanie tends to be more creative and interested in her friendships. Moreover, Stephanie’s parents put pressure on her to secure a well-paying job right out of college. Her sister, Maria, landed a position at a well-known national company and has not been available to offer much guidance for Stephanie. Stephanie is in good academic standing and will be on track to graduate if she takes 18 units the final two semesters. However, a few weeks into the semester she seems overwhelmed and disconnected from her friends and community. Stephanie feels that everyone gets to slow down and “take in” the final year of college—enjoying friends, building work experience through an internship, and making the most of their time before graduation. By mid-semester, she feels the opposite. Stephanie does not want to disappoint her family or academic advisor if she proposes slowing down. When you meet with Stephanie after mid-terms, she shares that she is overwhelmed. She feels like she is just getting by and still has not done any career preparation. The thought of adding an internship or applying for jobs on top of her current course load seems impossible.

#### Guiding Questions:

1. Where do you see the points of tension for Stephanie? Where might there be flexibility for her to accomplish her own priorities in alignment with others?
2. How might you respond if Stephanie came to you for support or guidance?
3. What resources exist on campus that could assist her given the specific situation? What other information about Stephanie’s situation would be helpful in order to tailor a recommendation to best suit her needs?
4. Reflecting on the concept of ecological validation, how could the norms framing student interactions (holistic, proactive, strengths-oriented, and developmental) and the work of educators (collaborative and reflective) be leveraged to support her?
5. What policies and practices could be shifted to address these challenges? How might this occur?