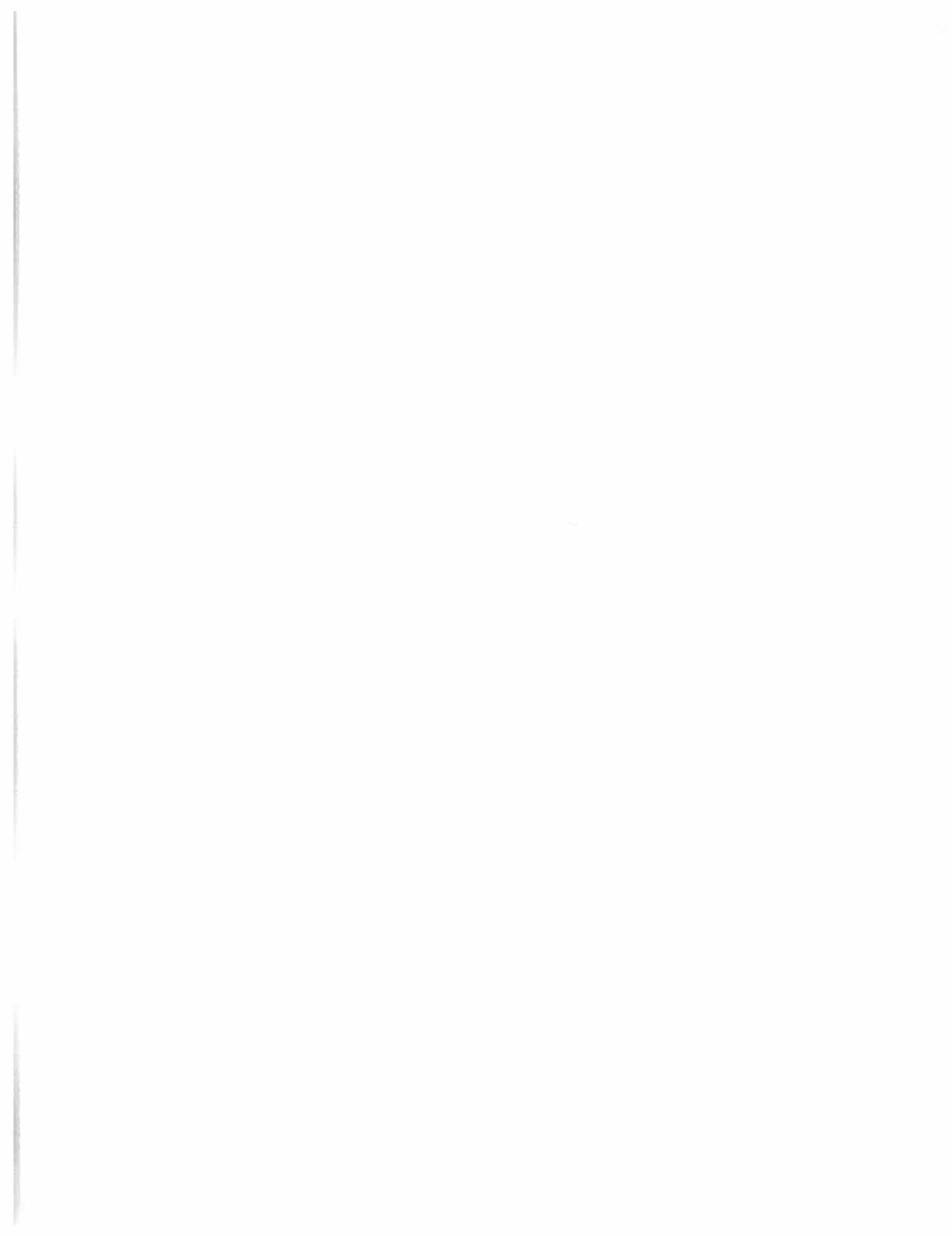# College status of youth served in Center for Urban Youth and Family Development agency's Summer Youth Employment Program

A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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College status of youth served in Center for Urban Youth and Family Development agency's summer youth employment program: A longitudinal review

Report

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Abstract

Postsecondary enrollment rates have increased substantially over the past three decades, and more first generation, low-income students, and students of color, including foster care youth, are enrolling in college today than ever before. However, foster care youth continue to enroll, complete credits, and graduate at lower rates than other low-income students. Pre-college outreach programs improve college access for underrepresented students; however, information on foster youth engagement in pre-college programs is virtually nonexistent. This evaluation report utilizes matched registration data from a Center for Urban Youth and Families Summer Youth Employment program that targeted high school enrolled foster care youth and student enrollment records maintained in the National Student Clearinghouse to determine the efficacy of this pre-college program on two- and four-year college enrollment and completion rates. Findings indicate that the vast majority of foster care youth in the sample who enrolled in post-secondary education institutions began and ended their journeys in the community college setting.

Introduction

Postsecondary enrollment rates have increased substantially over the past three decades, and more first generation, low-income students, and students of color, including foster care youth, are enrolling in college today than ever before (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). However, foster care youth continue to enroll, complete credits, and graduate at lower rates than their other low-income peers (Day et al., 2013; Day et al., 2011; Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). Specifically, one study found that 40 percent of foster care youth reported completing at least one year of college, compared to an estimate of 68 percent of youth in the general population (Courtney et al., 2011). Another study conducted by the National Association of Student Financial Aid

Administrators, when looking at pursuit of any type of post-secondary credential, found that only 26% of foster care alumni who enroll in college have earned a degree or certificate within six years of enrollment compared to 56% of their peers (Davis, 2006). In a study conducted by GAO (2016) of an analysis of federal financial aid data, it was found that 43 percent of foster care youth who received federal student aid in the 13-14 academic year attended public, two year colleges compared to 29 percent of other undergraduates receiving federal student aid. They also attended two year colleges at a higher rate than other low-income youth (GAO, 2016). Consistent with attendance at two year colleges, foster youth pursued an associate's degree to a greater extent (53%) than other students (48%), and were less likely to pursue a bachelor's degree (38% vs. 48% of non-foster youth) (GAO, 2016). Finally, the GAO (2016) study found that 72% of foster care youth had no degree or certificate within 6 years of first entering college- a far greater percentage than for low-income students (57%) and the student population as a whole (49%).

The majority of foster youth between the ages of 15 and 19 years of age (70%) have college aspirations (McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003). In this respect, they are like their non-foster peers (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004); despite this fact, income-related gaps among foster care youth and their non-foster care peers are large and appear to be growing (Macomber et al., 2008). Reasons for these disparities include the fact that foster care youth face a number of impediments to higher education, including weak academic foundations, lack of family and other caring adult supports, low expectations for academic achievement by members of the child welfare and secondary education systems, and lack of access to information on financial aid and resource networks (Day et al., 2012; Day et al., 2014; GAO, 2016). These weak academic foundations are largely attributable to placement disruption (and subsequent K-12 school moves associated with a change in foster care placement) (Smithgall, Gladden, Yang, & Goerge, 2005). Changes in school not only negatively affect academic progress, but also disrupt connections to peers and school professionals such as high school guidance counselors, who might otherwise be a source of social support that these youth could have turned to for help and advice on how to apply for, enroll and stay in college (Ersing, Sutphen, & Loeffler, 2009). Without these critical connections, foster youth do not learn about or become aware of the federal financial and other support resources that are available to help them pursue their post-secondary goals.

Not pursuing/completing postsecondary education limits prospects for employment has significant implications on life time earning potential. According to a study conducted by MPR Associates, a nonprofit consulting agency for the U.S. Department of Education, of 25-34 year olds who work full time, year round, higher educational attainment is associated with higher median earnings; for example, in 2013, median earnings for young adults with a bachelor's degree were $48,500, compared with $23,900 for those without a high school credential, $30,000 for those with a high school credential, and $37,500 for those with an associate's degree (U.S. DOE, 2015). Despite the myriad obstacles impacting employment outcomes of former foster youth, prior studies have identified meaningful protective factors like access to social support and less placement disruption while in care. (Courtney et al., 2005; George et al., 2002; Havalchak et al., 2007; Hook & Courtney, 2011; Macomber et al., 2008; Pecora et al., 2006). Employment-specific social network connections, like those offered through summer youth employment programs, have also been shown to increase a young person's

opportunities for early employment experience, which has been found to be associated with positive employment outcomes in early adulthood (Leventhal et al., 2001). Importantly, it is crucial to have career preparation programs that include strategies that ensure that youth are placed in jobs that align with their skills and talents, and pay a living wage. These employment placements are also more likely to be successful when they are trauma informed- meaning that employers have an understanding of the unique challenges foster youth face that may impede a successful work day. These include having an understanding of how court dates and subsequent changes in permanency goals, parental and sibling visitations (and cancelations) worker turnover, new medication management plans, and transportation barriers may impact worker absenteeism and functioning at the work setting.

Policy Efforts that Support Sumer Youth Employment Programs can Promote to Enhance College-going Among Foster Youth

Several steps have been taken to address the post-secondary education disparities plagued by foster youth. The education and training voucher (ETV) was the first federal program specifically created to promote college-going among current and former foster youth. The population of ETV eligible youth (those who have been in foster care on or after their 14th birthday and those who have not been adopted before their 16th birthday) is considerable. According to the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), in September 2014, more than 22,000 young people aged out of foster care (US DHHS, ACF, 2015).

Funded in 2001, under Title II of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments (P.L. 107–133), Congress authorized the educational and vocational training programs for older youth, leaving foster care under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). CFCIP is a capped state entitlement program, with an initial appropriation in fiscal year 2003 of $182 million (of which $42 million is dedicated to funding education and training vouchers (ETV)). Since 2003, this appropriation has fluctuated between $44 and $46 million (US DHHS, 2012). Each state receives an annual allocation based on their percentage of children and youth placed in foster care; they have two years to spend each year's allocation. States are required to provide 20% of their annual allocation through an in-kind or cash match. States can use their ETV funds to provide current and former foster youth with up to $5,000 per year for postsecondary training and education (GAO, 2016). The ETV can be used to defray the costs of the following types of expenses: tuition/fees, books and supplies, room and board, and miscellaneous personal expenses, including purchase of a personal computer, transportation, and child care.

Youth participating in the program on their 21st birthday remain eligible until age 23, as long as they are making satisfactory progress toward completion of their post-secondary training program. It is estimated that around 150,000 youth nationally meet the criteria to receive ETV funds. The largest drawback of this program is that foster youth who start college after age 21 are not eligible for the voucher. Additionally, current policy does not allow use of ETV funds to be used after the student turns 23 years of age. Due to school mobility issues, only 58% of foster care youth graduate from high school by age 19 (Courtney et al., 2007), which makes them

unlikely to graduate from college by the age of 23. Currently, students are losing access to critical financial aid resources in the middle of their college journeys, forcing students to stop and/or drop out of college in seek of employment.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's theory of student integration informed the development of this evaluation plan. Specifically, the interactions students have in their employment training program (both before and during college enrollment) influence their commitments and intentions in terms of completing their training goals. As students become more integrated into the culture of college, their goal commitment increases, which fosters continued enrollment and satisfactory academic progress. If students are not able to integrate into the academic training program and social communities at their employment site (pre-college) and higher education institution (during college) , their goal and institutional commitments are diminished, resulting in a greater likelihood of transferring or dropping out of school all together (Caison, 2005).

Purpose of the Current Study

Exposure to pre-college programs that offer skills and training to prepare students for the higher education environment is one way to address the disparities in college access for this population. Pre-college programs, like the Center for Urban Youth and Families Summer Youth Employment Program, are designed to increase college readiness through the offering of a variety of services including academic preparation, information about college and financial aid, psychosocial and behavioral supports, and the development of habits of mind including organizational skills, anticipation, persistence, and resiliency (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Research has shown that pre-college outreach programs improve college access for underrepresented students (Gándara & Bial, 2001; Vargas, 2004). In fact, Horn and Chen (1998) found that high school outreach programs almost doubled the odds of enrolling in college for high-risk students; however, fewer than five percent of high-risk students ever reported participating in such programs. Information on impact of foster youth engagement in pre-college programs, like summer youth employment programs is virtually nonexistent.

Pre-college Program Intervention Description

The Center for Urban Youth and Family Development has created a 6-week summer program focused on the enhancement of Detroit urban youth between the ages of 14 and 18 years who reside in the foster care system. Its philosophy is to address the various impacts of foster care and the long-term affect it can have on the psychological state of an individual including its impact involving family relationships and development. Mentoring, role modeling, and the socio-economic environment's influence on educational and career goals were woven into the main theme of the program. This three tier program consists of 1) Five Year Life Plan; 2) Community Service Project; 3) Substance Abuse Prevention Training; 4) Life Skills Development; and 5) a drug test.

Methods

A bivariate and multivariate research design, including logistic regression, was employed to model the trajectory of college enrollment and retention activity of a sample of foster care youth who were enrolled in the summer program at the Center for Urban Youth and Family Development. Logistic regression was an appropriate analytical tool for this study because of this method's ability to describe the relationship between a categorical dependent variable and a number of interval and categorical independent variables (Field, 2009). SPSS, version 23 was utilized for the analysis in this study.

Sample

A total of 141 high school aged foster care youth participated in summer youth employment program, and turned 18 years of age in the summers of 2010 through 2015, and were thus age eligible for enrollment in a higher education program. Among these youth, 43 (30.5%) subsequently enrolled in a post-secondary education program. Sample descriptions of all participants (Table 1) and those that enrolled in college (Table 2) can be seen in the tables below.

Data Sources

Registration data from a group of students who attended the summer pre-college program at the Center for Urban Youth and Family Development between 2010 and 2015 (and turned 18 on or after August 1, 2015) was matched with data maintained in the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). The NSC, founded in 1993, gathers enrollment data from participating colleges; and was originally designed to assist the loan industry in determining whether or not a student loan borrower was enrolled, and therefore exempt from paying back (or accruing interest) on student loans (Dynarski, Hemelt, & Hyman, 2013). The current study utilizes the student tracker feature of the NSC, a service that uses a proprietary algorithm to match the list of students supplied by the researchers to the NSC's detailed enrollment and degree information. The algorithm matches were based on student name and date of birth.

Variables

There are two dependent variables in this study, college enrollment (ever/never enrolled) and college retention (dropped out vs. continued/graduated). Two independent variables were modeled to predict college retention/graduation rates, number of times a student stopped out (or took a break) in the college process, and type of college attended in their journey (2 year, 4 year or both). These independent variables were selected for the final model based on their statistical significance in the bivariate models.

Findings

Table 1. Sample Characteristics by Percentage by College Enrollment Attempt

Characteristics	% Ever Enrolled	% Never Enrolled	N	Correlations with Ever and Never enrolled in college
Gender:				

Female	37.3%	62.7%	75	lambda= .000
Male	23.1%	76.9%	65	goodman-kruskal tau=.019
Participation Year:				
2010	37.5%	62.5%	32	Kendall's tau-c=.139
2011	36.2%	63.8%	47	Gamma=.210
2012	18.2%	81.8%	11	
2013	33.3%	66.7%	21	
2014	15.0%	85.0%	20	
2015	20.0%	80.0%	5	

Table 1 presents the bivariate relationships between participants' characteristics and whether they have ever enrolled in college. Female participants in this sample were more likely to have ever enrolled in college. Respondents who participated in the summer camp in the earliest year were significantly more likely to have ever enrolled in college (2010 vs 2015). Older participants were slightly more likely to have ever enrolled in college, which makes sense as they have had more time to make the decision to go, and then subsequently enroll.

Table 2. Sample Description by Percentage of Students who Enrolled in College and Their Subsequent college-going Behavior

Characteristics		% Dropped Out	% Continuing /Graduated	N	Correlations with Dropped out and Continuing/Graduated
Gender:					
	Female	75.0%	20.0%	28	lambda=.000
	Male	86.7%	12.3%	15	goodman-kruskal tau=.019
Participation Year:					
	2010	75.0%	25.0%	12	Kendall's tau-c= -.024
	2011	82.4%	15.6%	17	Gamma= - .049
	2012	100%	0%	2	
	2013	71.4%	28.6%	7	
	2014	66.7%	33.3%	3	
	2015	100%	0%	1	
Age at Summer Camp:	14			1	Kendall's tau-c= .138
	15	2.9%	0%	4	Gamma= .262
	16	8.8%	11.1%	13	

	17	17.6%	11.1%	23	
	18	38.2%	22.2%	45	
	19	20.6%	33.3%	29	
	20	8.8%	22.2%	14	
	21	2.9&	0%	6	
	23			1	
	24			1	
Age at first college enrollment:	15	3.0%	0%	1	Kendall's tau-c= .193
	16	3.0%	0%	1	Gamma= .368
	18	36.4%	22.2%	14	
	19	18.18%	22.2%	8	
	20	30.3%	33.3%	13	
	21	9.1%	0%	3	
	23	0%	11.1%	1	
	24	0%	11.1%	1	
Number of schools attended range:					
	1	76.9%	23.1%	26	Kendall's tau-c= -.041
	2	84.6%	15.4%	13	Gamma= -.118
	3	75.0%	25.0%	4	
Stopped Out:					
	Yes	81.25%	18.75%	16	lambda= .120
	No	77.8%	22.2%	27	goodman-kruskal tau= 0.63
StoppedOut Times:					
	0	77.8%	22.2%	27	Kendall's tau-c=.013
	1	100%	0.0%	10	Gamma=.033
	2	0.0%	100.0%	2	
	3	100%	0.0%	3	
Type of Colleges:					
	2-year	90.0%	10.0%	30	lambda= .091
	4-year	42.9%	57.1%	7	goodman-kruskal tau= .125
	Both	60.0%	40.0%	5	
Transfer:					
	Yes	80.0%	20.0%	15	lambda=.000
	No	78.6%	21.4%	28	goodman-kruskal tau=.000

Table 2 presents the bivariate relationships between the characteristics of participants who enrolled in college, and whether the participants dropped out of or graduated from/continued with college. Slightly more male participants dropped out of college compared to female participants. Sample participants who participated in the summer camp earlier were more likely to drop out of college. Younger college enrollees were slightly more likely to drop out of college. Participants who enrolled in college when they were older were significantly more likely to drop out of college. Participants who attended more schools were slightly more likely to drop out. Participants who stopped out (took a break) were not more likely to drop out of college than those who never stopped out. The more times a respondent stopped out, the significantly less likely he/she would drop out of college. Participants who only attended 4-year colleges were less likely to drop out of college compared to respondents who attended 2-year colleges or those that experienced enrollment in both 2-year and 4-year colleges. Participants who attended private colleges at least once were more likely to drop out. Transfer students were slightly more likely to drop out of college than students who enrolled/graduated from a college in which they were first time ever enrolled in a college student. A participant who transferred multiple times was more likely to drop out of college than those who only transferred one time.

Discussion

About 31% of the participants in the pre-college summer program at the Center for Urban Youth and Family Development went on to enroll in college. This rate is much higher than the experiences of foster care youth nationwide, which stands at a rate of approximately 10% (Tzawa-Hayden, 2004). Although this is a promising finding, far too many participants failed to enroll. Of those that did enroll in a post-secondary program, the vast majority began their journeys in community college settings. To be college eligible, foster care youth have to graduate from high school first, and the current study was unable to determine which of the students who failed to enroll in college actually had a high school diploma. Another important finding is that a high percent of those who enrolled in college failed to be retained. This could be attributed in part to the fact that many of these students may have been ill-prepared for post-secondary coursework. There are large differences between what high schools teach and what colleges expect, and large disparities between instruction offered by high schools with high concentrations of high poverty students (where foster care youth are over-represented) and that offered by high schools with high enrollments of more advantaged students (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Not surprisingly, foster care youth who do successfully enroll in college are more likely to need to enroll in remedial courses to catch up to their peers who attended more affluent high schools (Day et al., 2011). Remedial courses do not count towards students' degree requirements, and thus, participation in these courses delays time to graduation (Dworsky & Perez, 2009). This suggests that this population is in need of access to both targeted college access programs (like pre-college programs) and specialized college retention programs (i.e.

Guardian Scholars) from the time of college enrollment through college completion. Several of the participants transferred colleges multiple times, which may demonstrate that these students did not successfully integrate into the social and academic culture of the institutions they enrolled. Access to targeted campus-based programs that provide foster youth with wrap-around services and supports they need to succeed in school and graduate are greatly needed. These types of programs are becoming increasingly available; no two programs are alike, but many offer academic tutoring, social and mentoring and emotional support; year round housing; and financial aid (Dworsky & Perez, 2009). The vast majority of these programs, however, are offered at 4-year rather than 2-year institutions. Hence, another way to increase college retention and graduation rates among this population would be for the federal government or the states to fund the implementation and evaluation of these targeted campus support initiatives at both two- and four-year institutions.

Implications for Policy and Practice

There is a need for community colleges and universities around the nation to develop intervention programs that target foster care youth to improve college access and student retention rates. Current retention strategies are often not successful, perhaps in part because the interventions are designed based upon research of all students who leave an institution, when there is broad diversity in the motives and purposes among students who do not continue (Caison, 2005). One method that could be employed to increasing college access for foster care youth may include the deployment of community college and university-based TRIO program staff to work more closely with child welfare authorities and community based agencies that offer foster care specific summer youth employment experiences, like the Center for Urban, Youth and Families, as a way to increase the number of foster care youth entering college. As part of the federal TRIO program, the Federal Department of Education offers discretionary Student Support Services (SSS) grants to postsecondary programs to increase college retention and graduation rates for low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). SSS programs provide tutoring, academic and career counseling, mental health counseling and assistance in applying for financial aid. SSS programs can also provide services that may be of particular help to current and former youth in foster care, such as mentoring, and help in securing temporary housing during breaks in the academic year. Housing options are particularly scarce in the community college settings as residence halls have not been considered critical components in these settings; residential halls could be used as venues to integrate these students both academically and socially into campus life (Bryant, 2001). Federal law also allows postsecondary programs to use SSS grants to create programs that are tailored to the needs of youth in or who have aged out of foster care (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Other types of federal funding resources that could be tapped to address the shortcomings in Chaffee funding to support college-going foster youth include access to cash assistance through Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (AAUW, 2009), the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) (Bird et al., 2014), and student support dollars allocated through the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. These federal funding streams have less restrictive eligibility criteria, and could follow foster youth through college completion. WIOA funding

could also provide subsidized employment in professional internships to these youth to enhance their career advancement opportunities.

Strengths and Limitations of the study

There are both promises and pitfalls associated with the use of NSC data to measure post-secondary outcomes. First, the analysis of NSC data to measure post-secondary outcomes related to attendance, persistence and attainment is relatively new; it provides a rich source of information when and where students enroll, at what intensity, and whether and when they earn a degree (Dynarski, Hemelt, & Hyman, 2013). Not all colleges report enrollment information to the NSC. As of fall 2011, NSC reported that they cover 93% of post-secondary enrollment. Coverage is high among public institutions of higher education (99%); however, for-profit colleges report lower use (48%) (Dynarski, Hemelt, & Hyman, 2013). It is possible that there may be students in the sample who do not appear in the NSC data due to attendance at non-reporting, for-profit colleges; these students are indistinguishable from students who never enrolled in college. While NSC coverage is low for for-profit colleges, the impact on this study may be minimal as enrollment at these institutions accounts for a very small share of undergraduate enrollment (i.e. 10%). Another limitation of the use of the dataset is the chance for matching errors due to the chance of typographical inaccuracies in student names entered into the database. Certainly there were a few students in the current sample who we were unable to match in the clearinghouse to track their education trajectories because of a lack access to accurate middle initials and birthdates. Additionally while the overall model predictability was high at 75.8%, this still means that over 24% of the predictors for college enrollment and retention are not known. An exploration of possible additional factors could be identified in future mixed methods or qualitative studies that include direct participant voices.

Conclusion

In a knowledge economy it is becoming increasingly important to obtain a post-secondary credential (i.e. 2 year, 4 year or vocational certification) to be able to secure and maintain meaningful employment that pays a living wage. New strategies are needed to ensure that our nation's most vulnerable young people, those who have a history of placement in the foster care system, are able to transition successfully from high school to college, work and life.

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