



Invited summaries of research for scholar and practitioner advocates for, traditionally hidden college student populations

Current Hidden College Student Populations

May include those who have foster care or justice-involved experiences, who are survivors of sexual violence, who are recovering drug or alcohol addicts, who face housing insecurity, or who are considered Third Culture Kids

R is for Thursday

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National Conference for Engaged Scholarship on Hidden Student Populations

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The Scholar-Practitioner is a monthly publication of invited research summaries that target the research-to-practice gap for U.S. scholar and practitioner advocates for college students with experiences in foster care and other hidden college student populations.

This publication reinforces the work of the **National Conference for Engaged Scholarship on Hidden Student Populations (NCHP)** by providing a space to share research applications for practice. NCHP was the first research conference dedicated to this multidisciplinary area of study. The NCHP 3rd conference will be held at Oklahoma State University, September 14-16, 2022.

Stopping Out and Its Impact on College Graduation Among a Sample of Foster Care Alumni: A Joint Scale-Change Accelerated Failure Time Analysis

Day, A. G., Smith, R. J. & Tajima, E. A. (2021). Stopping Out and Its Impact on College Graduation Among a Sample of Foster Care Alumni: A Joint Scale-Change Accelerated Failure Time Analysis. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 12(1), 11-39.

Research Summary by A. G. Day and J. Savage

This study examines whether Foster Care Alumni (FCA) are more likely to “stop out” of a four-year university compared to low-income, first-generation students who have not been wards of the court. “Stopping out” is a term coined by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in 1980 and refers to the experience of leaving college and then reenrolling after an extended period of absence.

The authors explain that while it is estimated that approximately 10% of FCA enroll in college, one study (Courtney, et. al, 2009) that used data from the Midwest Evaluation found that just 6% of FCA had a college degree by age 23-24, far below the 33% estimated for the general population.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following questions. It was hypothesized that FCA would be more likely to experience a stopping out episode and that they would take longer to complete their degrees when compared with first-generation, low-income students. It was also hypothesized that foster youth who experienced a stop-out period would be less likely to graduate than other first-generation, low-income students who stopped out.

1. What is the average time to graduation for students by ward of the court (FCA) status who stop out versus those who remain continuously enrolled?
2. Are youths who have experienced foster care more likely to stop out during college than other low-income, first-generation students?

3. Do students with foster care histories who stop out graduate at a lower rate than other first-generation, low-income students who also experience a stop-out episode?
4. Is there a difference in time to graduation for FCA compared with other first-generation, low-income students (controlling for stop outs, GPA, transfer status, gender, and race)?

Methodology

This study used higher education administrative data collected and managed by the registrar, admissions, financial aid, and budget and planning offices of one large, public, 4-year university in Michigan to examine college retention and graduation rates of students who were enrolled between fall 2000 and summer 2009. Data from a stratified random sample of 803 students were analyzed, including 438 former wards of the court who were identified by their Federal Application for Student Aid and a comparison group of 365 low-income, first-generation college students.

Because graduation within 6 years is considered “on time,” the study examined 10 years of data to ensure that there was ample time to observe students who may have stopped out of college but still graduated.

Findings

1. **Average Time to Graduation:** FCA who never experienced a stop out had an average time to graduation of 13.5 semesters while the comparison group took an average of 11 semesters to graduate. By contrast, it is estimated that FCA who did have a stop out episode took an average of 50.4 semesters to graduate compared to 21.8 for the other first-generation, low-income students who stopped out.
2. **Likelihood of Stopping Out:** While 43.4% of FCA experienced at least one stopping out event, just 27.1% of the first-generation, low-income students who had not experienced foster care stopped out. The study also found that African American students (46.7%) were much more likely to stop out than their white peers.
3. **Effect of Stopping Out on Graduation Rates:** The research indicates that 16.8% of FCA in the sample who stopped out reenrolled and either graduated or were on track to graduate while 12.1% of students in the comparison group who stopped out later reenrolled and graduated or were on track to graduate.

4. **Effect of Stopping Out on Time to Graduation:** The authors found there were no statistically significant differences in time to graduation between FCA and the comparison group.

Implications

The 21st century knowledge economy often requires that one acquire a postsecondary degree in order to attain financial stability. Most FCA students also depend on financial aid, particularly Pell Grants which are the largest means-tested financial aid resource available to undergraduates. However, students are only eligible for Pell Grants for 12 semesters and thus FCA who stop out or fluctuate between stopping out and part-time attendance can lose this important resource and that could discourage students from reenrolling and completing their postsecondary degree after stopping out.

References

Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Lee, J. S., & Raap, M. (2009). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at ages 23 & 24*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. <https://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest Study Age 23 24.pdf>

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Sept. 14-16, 2022



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