



Invited summaries of research for scholar and practitioner allies of foster alumni and other traditionally hidden college student populations

Hidden College Student Populations

Not visibly identifiable

Often without voice

May be resistant to self-identifying

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The Scholar-Practitioner is a bi-monthly publication of invited research summaries that target the research-to-practice gap for U.S. scholar and practitioner allies for former foster youth and other traditionally hidden college student populations. The first six issues pre-empt the **National Conference for Engaged Scholarship on Foster Alumni and other traditionally hidden college populations**, the nation's first research conference in this interdisciplinary area of study. The conference will be hosted by OSU and held February 19-20, 2020, in Washington D.C.

Financial support for the 2020 conference is being provided by the Spencer Foundation and the OSU Christine Cashel Professorship in Higher Education & Student Affairs. The 2020 conference leadership team is: Kerri Kearney and Lisa Will, OSU; Lori Tiller, University of Georgia; Jennifer Geiger, University of Illinois; Royel Johnson, The Pennsylvania State University; and Megan Piel, The University of Texas at San Antonio. The conference will be held in concert with, and with conference support from, the 39th Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina (director Jennifer Keup).

Stopping out and its impact on college graduation among a sample of foster care youth: A joint scale-change accelerated failure time analysis

Day, A., Smith, R., Tajima, E., Quist, L. & Pennefather, M. (2019, In Press). Stopping out and its impact on college graduation among a sample of foster care youth: A joint scale-change accelerated failure time analysis. *Journal of Social Work Research*.

Research Summary

Post-secondary attrition takes several forms: some students drop out; some transfer; others end enrollment and re-enroll after an extended absence, known as "stopping out," a term coined by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in 1980 (Levine, 2012). The distinction between dropping out and stopping out is important for higher education providers, campus program staff, and policymakers who make decisions about higher education funding. Failure to distinguish between permanent withdrawal and a temporary stop out may lead to erroneous conclusions about students' motivations and behaviors, the factors influencing attrition (Stratton, O'Toole & Wetzel, 2008), and is a missed opportunity to inform programming to support student retention, especially for underrepresented students like foster care alumni (FCA).

Research Questions

What is the average time to graduation for FCA who stop out versus those who remain continuously enrolled?

Are FCA more likely to stop out during college than other low-income, first generation students?

Do FCA who stop out graduate at a lower rate than other first generation, low income students who also experience a stop out episode?

Is there a difference in time to graduation for FCA compared with other first generation, low income students?

Participants and Method:

This study utilized higher education administrative data collected from one large, Midwest, four-year University to examine college retention and graduation rates of 803 undergraduate students, 438 who identified on their FAFSA as FCA; the other 365 comprised a stratified random sample of low-income, first generation college students who did not identify themselves as FCA on their FAFSA.

Both groups were enrolled in college between Fall 2000 and Summer 2009. Given that a six-year graduation rate is considered "on time," 10 years of data were tracked to observe students who may have stopped out of college, but still experienced the event of graduation, albeit, late.

Findings

FCA were less likely to graduate as compared to their low income, first generation peers. FCA were much more likely to have transferred into the four-year university from another college/university setting than the comparison group. FCA also graduated at a slower pace than the comparison group. Specifically, the mean time to graduation was 13.5

semesters for FCA who never experienced a stop out episode and 11 semesters for the comparison group. For FCA who experienced one or more stop out episodes, the estimated mean time to graduation was 50.4 semesters and for the comparison group with at least one episode stop out, the average was 21.8 semesters.

Thirty six percent of the total sample experienced at least one period of stopping out during their college trajectory. The range of experiences of stopping out was 0-5, with 29% of the total sample experiencing 1 stop out, and 6.8% experiencing 2 or more stop out episodes.

As hypothesized, FCA were significantly more likely to experience a stop out episode (43.4%) than their non-foster care, low-income, first-generation peers (27.1%).

Although stopping out slows time to graduation, it does not mean that students will drop out of school permanently. In this sample, 16.8% of FCA who experienced a stop out episode successfully re-enrolled and either graduated or were on track to graduate at the end of the observation period. Only 12.1% of the students in the comparison group who stopped out re-enrolled and subsequently graduated or were on track to graduate.

Implications for Public Policies

The finding of time to graduation for FCA (13.5 semesters) is especially salient. Many FCA pursuing a degree do not have access to Pell Grant funding after the six-year (12 semesters) lifetime limit. The decision by Congress to limit

Pell Grant funding in 2011 to 12 semesters of post-secondary enrollment is of grave concern for college enrolled FCA.

Congress needs to reconsider restrictions on the Education Training Voucher and Pell grant policies for FCA.

Implications for Practice for Campus

More campus-based resources are needed, including comprehensive wraparound student support services that not only target students in their first year, but support FCA from college entry to graduation. Services must address the particular challenges they face, even in comparison to other vulnerable groups such as other low-income, first generation students.

Conclusion

Federal policies (i.e., Education and Training Voucher, College Cost Reduction Act, Pell Grants) have increased college access for FCS; however, increasing college access does not always lead to degree attainment. The findings of this study speak to the need to amend these financial aid policies to better align with the educational trajectories and needs of this subpopulation.

Levine, A. (2012). Clark Kerr and the Carnegie Commission and Council. In S. Rothblatt (Ed). Clark Kerr's World of Higher Education Reaches the 21st century: Chapters in a Special History. (pp. 43-60). Dordrecht, Netherlands. Springer.

Stratton, L. S., O'Toole, D. M., & Wetzel, J. N. (2008). A multinomial logit model of college stop out and dropout behavior. Economics of Education Review, 27(3), 319-331.

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP ON FOSTER ALUMNI
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