



NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR

ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP — on — FOSTER ALUMNI

& OTHER TRADITIONALLY HIDDEN
COLLEGE POPULATIONS



INAUGURAL CONFERENCE
February 19-20, 2020
Washington D.C.



FUNDING FOR THE INAUGURAL CONFERENCE PROVIDED BY:

The Spencer Foundation

Oklahoma State University Christine Cashel Professorship

Oklahoma State University

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AGENDA

February 19, 2020

Day 1: Current Research

1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Registration &
Pre-conference Networking

Balcony A

2:00 p.m. - 2:25 p.m.

Welcome & Conference Overview
- Kerri Kearney

Balcony A

2:25 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Move to concurrent sessions

2:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Concurrent Session 1

3:00 p.m. - 3:10 p.m.

*Break (move rooms)

3:10 p.m. - 3:40 p.m.

Concurrent Session 2

3:40 p.m. - 3:50 p.m.

Break (move rooms)

3:50 p.m. - 4:20 p.m.

Concurrent Session 3

4:20 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

*Break (move rooms)

4:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Concurrent Session 4

5:00 p.m. - 5:10 p.m.

Break (move rooms)

5:10 p.m. - 5:40 p.m.

Concurrent Session 5

5:40 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.

*Break (check in,
take luggage to room,
freshen up, etc.)

6:15 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Social & Team Meet and
Greet, heavy
hors d'oeuvres/drinks
provided

(6:45 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.- Brief
Team Meetings during Social)

NOTES:

Details on concurrent session
titles, speakers, and locations
available in later section.

*Please note: To best manage
expenses, water available outside
of meeting rooms. Coffee and
other snacks available in the hotel
common areas.

AGENDA

February 20, 2020

Day 2: Research Team Design and Next Steps

7:30 a.m. - 8:15 a.m.

Continental Breakfast
and Informal Networking

Hoover Room

8:15 a.m. - 8:25 a.m.

Welcome Back -
Kerri Kearney

8:30 a.m. - 8:50 a.m.

Comments -
Special Guests

8:50 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

Break

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Research Team Meetings
Team Leads meet with
respective teams

12:00 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.

Lunch on your own/with
your team

1:15 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.

Research Team Meetings
Team Leads meet with
respective teams

3:45 p.m. - 5:15 p.m.

Team Report Outs and
Large Group Feedback

3:45 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Team 1
4:00 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.	Team 2
4:15 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Team 3
4:30 p.m. - 4:45 p.m.	Team 4
4:45 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Team 5
5:00 p.m. - 5:15 p.m.	Team 6

5:15 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Research Kick-Off/Looking
forward to 2021 Conference

Close of Conference

NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR

ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP on FOSTER ALUMNI

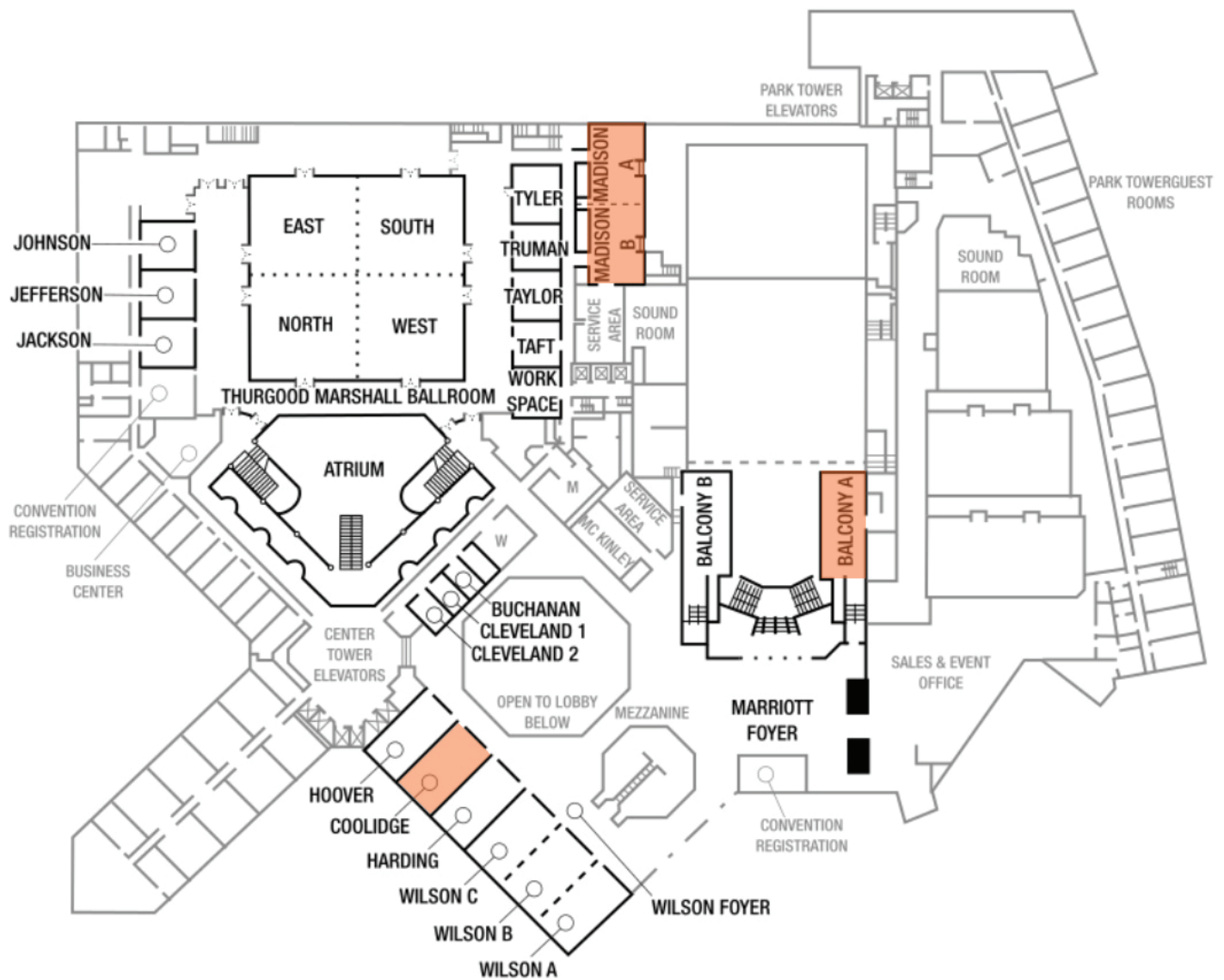
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their experiences so that we may learn

Washington Marriott Wardman Park

Mezzanine Level Floor Plan



Concurrent Sessions

2:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. - Concurrent Session 1



Mauriell Amechi - Madison

College-Going Pathways of Black Foster Youth:
Exploring the Historically Black College and
University Experience

Shelia Bustillos and Christine Norton - Balcony A

A Conceptual Framework for Foster Care Liaisons in
Higher Education

3:10 p.m. - 3:40 p.m. - Concurrent Session 2



Jacob Okumu and Kay-Anne Darling - Madison

Marginalized Positionalities of Self-Shaping:
Experiences of Emancipated Foster Care,
Transgender, First generation College Students

Angela Hoffman - Balcony A

Education Fostering Risk or Resilience: A Critical
Discourse Analysis of Campus-Based Support for
Students with Experience in Foster Care

3:50 p.m. - 4:20 p.m. - Concurrent Session 3



**Matthew Heard, Jacqueline Vickery, and Brenda
Sweeten - Madison**

Coalition-Building in Foster Care Focus Groups

Toni Hail - Balcony A

Foster Care Alumni After College: A Retrospective Lens

Concurrent Sessions

4:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. - Concurrent Session 4



Lisa Jackson and Lisa Schelbe - Madison

Looking beyond graduation: Experiences of former foster youth and homeless students who were involved in a campus-based support program

Regina Gavin-Williams - Balcony A

The Effects of Customized Individual Counseling Interventions on the Career and College Readiness of Adolescents in the Foster Care System

5:10 p.m. - 5:40 p.m. - Concurrent Session 5



Toni Watt - Madison

The Texas Tuition and Fee Waiver Program for Youth Experiencing Foster Care: An Assessment of Waiver Utilization and Impact

Linda Schmidt - Balcony A

Campus Support Programs for Youth with Experience in Foster Care

PLEASE NOTE:

In order to further assist teams in literature reviews for their studies, a webinar drawing from two published reviews of the literature on foster alumni in college is available at the Conference Site Canvas page. A special thank you to **Royel Johnson**, Pennsylvania State University, and **Jennifer Geiger**, University of Illinois at Chicago, for this special contribution to the Conference.

College-Going Pathways of Black Foster Youth: Exploring the Historically Black College and University Experience

Presenter: Mauriell Amechi

Abstract: National statistics indicate that Black youth remain vastly overrepresented in foster care. While two percent of Black foster youth enroll at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Gross, 2016), little is known about their experiences and motivations to enroll. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of African American foster youth enrolled at HBCUs. Findings from this study have important implications for research, policy, and practice.

Problem: Although growth in the U.S. foster care population has remained steady over the last decade, Black children are vastly overrepresented (Children's Bureau, 2017). Today, they make up 23% of the foster care population. Several notable factors uniquely shape the experience of Black youth in foster care: they are least likely to be adopted, experience more extended placements, and are more susceptible to reaching the age of emancipation before permanency (Children's Bureau, 2017). It is also true that teenage family formation is more common among African American foster youth (Dworsky et al., 2010). The combination of these factors and other structural challenges create a formidable barrier to college access and completion. Despite the imbalance of African Americans in the U.S. foster care system, scholarship focused on their experiences across diverse postsecondary environments remains scarce.

Despite the myriad hurdles Black foster youth encounter in the education pipeline (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004; Pecora et al., 2006), they often aspire to attend college, and some go on to actualize their academic goals (Lane, 2016). Gross's (2016) policy brief offers a snapshot of college enrollment patterns among foster care

alumni. African American foster youth were overrepresented relative to their same race counterparts (24.9 and 12.5, respectively). Furthermore, an estimated two percent of foster youth enrolled at HBCUs in 2012. But, to date, there have been no published analyses on the experiences of foster youth at HBCUs and what motivates them to enroll.

Theoretical Framework: Community cultural wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005) is used as an analytical framework in this study. According to Yosso (2005), CCW includes the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts that socially marginalized communities leverage to survive and resist oppressive social forces and barriers. Yosso's CCW model proposes six interrelated forms of capital (see Table 1 for full description): social, aspirational, navigational, resistant, linguistic, and familial capitals. College access and preparation literature is deeply rooted in whiteness, traditional conceptualizations of cultural capital, and dated conceptions of family/parental engagement (McDonough, 1997; Palbusa & Gouvain, 2017; Perna & Kurban, 2013). Notwithstanding the contributions of existing literature, it has not provided sufficient insight into disrupting social inequalities in college access and success for foster care alumni. Through centering the lived experiences of marginalized populations, CCW provides utility in understanding the supports resilient foster youth use to not only overcome sociostructural barriers in care but also to access selective universities where they remain underrepresented.



Methodology: In this investigation, we used a critical qualitative approach (Denzin, 2015; Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz, & Gildersleeve, 2012) to facilitate an understanding of how foster care alumni nurture cultural wealth to develop and sustain postsecondary aspirations, despite adversities in the foster care system and complexities related to the college-going process at universities. A qualitative approach was well suited for this topic because it provided utility in exploring participant experiences and perceptions, offering a nuanced and in-depth understanding of their journeys to college.

Data Analysis: Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional. Using an eclectic coding scheme (Saldaña, 2013), interview transcripts were uploaded to NVivo 11 Pro®, a qualitative data analysis software program. This method involves the predetermined combination of two or more first cycle coding schemes, offering versatility in coding the data corpus both deductively and inductively (Saldaña, 2013). A peer debriefer assisted with coding the first two transcripts to establish confirmability. After independently developing a codebook based on the first two transcripts, we subsequently combined them to identify common code words that were used in the formal systematic coding process. Using the Memos feature within NVivo 11 Pro®, the research team also created an audit trail during the data analysis phase, which included analytic memos (Saldaña, 2013).

Findings/Implications: Black foster youth in this study came from low socioeconomic backgrounds and were generally the first in their families to attend college. Participants noted the significance and influential role of campus support programs in shaping their college choice process. Several participants described how the program staff member served as a single point of contact in navigating both external and internal challenges. While participants were generally admitted to several colleges, access to sufficient student financial aid was also a primary factor in their college choice process. When asked what influenced her decision to attend an HBCU, Viveca shared,

The foster care initiative program. I wanted to be around peers who had gone through the same situations. So I wanted to be at a [college] that has a diversity initiative that supports foster care. And when I took my first college tour, I fell in love with this school.

Key implications for practitioners:

- Expansion of student services at HBCUs (and HWIs) to close enrollment gap
- Increase funding for services at HBCUs, particularly year-round housing and financial aid
- Establish a single point of contact on campus

Table 1

Theoretical Framework: Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005)

1. **Aspirational capital:** the ability to persevere toward a postsecondary goal in spite of real or perceived barriers.
2. **Navigational capital:** the ability to maneuver institutions that have historically marginalized or excluded members of the group to which one belongs.
3. **Social capital:** the network of people and community resources that can provide essential support and resources in navigating life.
4. **Familial capital:** the network of family, including extended kin, that fosters a sense of community and model lessons of caring, coping, and providing mindfulness.
5. **Resistant capital:** refers to the use of knowledge and skills developed from oppositional behaviors and identities that resist inequality.
6. **Linguistic capital:** the ability to communicate in multiple languages and/or styles.

A Conceptual Framework for Foster Care Liaisons in Higher Education

Presenters: Shelia Bustillos & Christine Norton


Abstract: Foster Care Liaisons, or higher education professionals who provide support for students formerly from foster care, are not required to have any mandated training. There are no clearly defined expectations for the liaison role. Based on a pragmatic, problem-driven content analysis of a national sample of eight job descriptions and eight state-wide liaison manuals, our team developed a national conceptual framework for foster care liaisons including liaison expectations, training, and evaluation.

Problem: In this study, we focus on the liaison role and the impact the liaison can have in guiding students formerly from foster care to achieve their post-secondary educational goals. From secondary to post-secondary education, professionals recognize the essential nature of foster care liaisons in education systems (Casey Family Programs, 2010; Okpych & Courtney, 2017; National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2016; Weinberg, Oshiro, & Shea, 2014). Many states created information manuals for foster care liaisons in higher education to centralize and organize liaison responsibilities. However, we know little about how these roles are actually performed in the day-to-day lives of professionals in higher education.

Theoretical Framework: Research shows that students supported by people around them (teachers, mentors, staff, faculty) perform better and are more likely to stay in school (Okpych & Courtney, 2017; Weinberg, Oshiro, & Shea, 2014; Hass, Allen, and Amoah 2014). Coleman's (1988) work on social capital informs the need for all students to have points of contact and connect with staff, faculty, and administrators in order to succeed in school. The social capital theory, applied in an educational setting, enhances the ability for students and professionals in academic communities (teachers, mentors, and staff) to build and maintain relationships that ultimately aid in student success (Okpych & Courtney, 2017). Social capital provides a useful theoretical framework for outlining the benefits of relationship building in higher education, and directly supports the need to connect students formerly from foster care with foster care liaisons.

Methodology: A pragmatic, problem-driven content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) inspired by grounded theory coding approach (Charmaz, 2014) is the best methodological fit to answer how the foster care liaison role should be defined. In this project, instead of building theory to test through action, we built a conceptual framework to later test with experts on the validity of the model.





Data Analysis: We used the adopted grounded theory coding and contextual analysis standards for our project to record and code the data (Krippendorff, 2004; Charmaz, 2014). We used an adopted grounded theory coding process, which includes three coding stages: line-by-line initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. The frequency and prominence of themes were negotiated by members of the research team during each of the coding stages to determine the significance of the themes.

Findings: The conceptual framework emerged from the data to efficiently communicate what the liaison does and how they perform their role on college campuses across the nation. The Foster Care Liaison Conceptual framework represents the three methods liaisons employ to perform tasks. As mentioned earlier, the data show that foster care liaisons perform their tasks in three ways: relational, functional, and transformational. We outline each method in the conceptual framework above using evidence from the data. Social capital is embedded throughout each performed liaison task. Any contact with students formerly from foster care by the foster care liaison has potential to increase social capital for them.

Implications: This research clarifies and prioritizes responsibilities for foster care liaisons in their role to structure training, direction, and support. Having a manual for the role is helpful, but it does not ensure evidence-based and targeted training. This conceptual framework offers a guide for evaluating the liaison role in higher education. Expanding social capital for students formerly from foster care can widen their network of caring individuals in their lives, increasing the number of people that they have available to help them in trying situations.

Social capital is both difficult for students formerly from foster care to acquire and imperative in their educational and professional success (Okpych & Courtney, 2017; Rutman & Hubberstey 2016). The foster care liaison conceptual framework is a framework to engage student development in higher education and increase opportunities for alumni to build social and cultural capital with the guidance of a trained, supportive professionals who understand their past and value their future.

The Effects of Customized Individual Counseling Interventions on the Career and College Readiness of Adolescents in the Foster Care System

Presenter: Regina Gavin Williams

Problem: The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of customized individual counseling interventions on the career and college readiness of adolescents in foster care via a quantitative research dissertation study.


Theoretical Framework: An intervention program, consisting of customized individual interventions, entitled Students That Are Reaching Success (S.T.A.R.S.) was created by the counselor/investigator. The three female participants were adolescents in foster care custody by a department of social services and attended different high schools. The conceptual frameworks for the S.T.A.R.S program were: the Ecological Model for Human Development, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), Cognitive Information Processing Approach (CIP), and the American School Counselor Association's National Model. They were used as a foundation for creating individualized counseling interventions for each participant. An N=1/ A-B-A single-subject experimental design was replicated three times to enhance generalization of the findings and offset possible attrition of participations.

Methodology: After baseline (Phase A1) data were collected over a two-week period, participants met with the counselor/investigator individually for one hour, once per week, for six weeks during the treatment intervention program (Phase B). Outcome data were collected throughout Phase B. Following the six-week intervention, there was a two-week hiatus from the treatment when outcome data were collected again (Phase A2 repeated-withdrawal). The Career and College Readiness Self-Efficacy Inventory (CCRSI) was the measure from which the dependent variables were derived. The customized individual career and college readiness counseling intervention was

the independent variable, and the four CCRSI career and college readiness self-efficacy factors were the dependent variables. The four CCRSI factors were: (a) college knowledge, (b) positive personal characteristics, (c) academic competence, and (d) potential to achieve future goals. Data from the baseline (A1), treatment (B), and withdrawal (A2) phases were analyzed via an R software package used for analyzing single-subject data. Descriptive data were presented. Autocorrelations were also calculated for each phase of each factor of the intervention for each participant.

Data Analysis: A regression analysis was used to determine if there was a significant trend in any phase for each factor of the intervention. The Robust Conservative Dual-Criteria (RCDC) method was then used as a statistical analysis tool, and the G-index statistic was used to calculate effect size. A visual analysis was conducted in the form of line graphs and regression plot graphs. Furthermore, the fidelity of treatment was recorded in the counselor/investigator's field notes, and unforeseen participant and setting changes were both documented and discussed.





Findings: The findings indicated that the post-secondary education going needs of individuals vary across the career and college readiness self-efficacy factors. Moreover, using applicable conceptual frameworks such as the Ecological Model of Human Development, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), the Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) Approach, and the American School Counselor Association Model as foundations for designing interventions has potential for making them more substantive and standardized. There appears to be no previous empirical literature on understanding and enhancing career and college readiness of foster care youth. The present study made an important contribution, and more research is clearly needed. As other professional fields, such as social work, continue to provide research that sheds light on the educational deficits and subsequent needs of youth in foster care, especially with transitional age foster care youth, the counseling field is challenged to demonstrate how practitioners can develop and evaluate useful interventions.

Implications: Recommendations for practice included the need for school counselors to create customized counseling interventions to meet the individualized career and college readiness needs of foster care youth, the need for counselors to establish bidirectional relationships between themselves and other members of the foster youths' support networks, and the need for college counselors to create support groups for transition-aged foster care youth within the post-secondary educational environment. Recommendations for future research included replication of the current study to increase generalizability to adolescents in foster care, research on the impact support networks have on the career and college readiness of adolescents in foster care, and additional research on the role school counselors can play in the career and

college readiness of foster care youth. The findings revealed that customized individual counseling interventions can indeed enhance the career and college readiness self-efficacy of adolescents in foster care. Recognizing that the educational needs of foster care youth are both individual and unique, assessment tools, such as the CCRSI, can be used as both a tool to customize interventions that can meet individual needs and to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions.

Foster Care Alumni After College: A Retrospective Lens

Presenter: Toni Hail

Abstract: A specific group of foster care alumni, those who “age out” of foster care, share the same aspirations to complete college as their non-foster care peers; however, there is an obvious discrepancy in actual outcomes between the two groups in terms of completing their degrees. The focus of this research was to gain insight and knowledge about facilitators for the small percent of foster care alumni that persisted and completed a bachelor’s degree in Oklahoma.


Problem: Research from the literature in social work and education has produced a wealth of problem-saturated products, yet the scholarly literature does not adequately address the ingredients for persistence among the small percent of foster alumni who complete college despite the odds. An understanding of the contributors to former foster youth who persist and attain college degrees, from their insider perspectives, may create an understanding of how to maximize potential and best utilize existing state resources for this population. Oklahoma, in particular, is one of fourteen states in the United States with existing initiatives to support foster care alumni on college campuses. The purpose of this multi-case study (Stake, 2006) was to explore the foster care alumni’s perceptions of contributors to their ability to persist through college and obtain a bachelor’s degree. Specifically, the focal point of this study was foster care alumni who graduated from a public institution in the state of Oklahoma within the past ten years.

Theoretical Framework: This study expanded on the foundation of Ryan and Deci’s (1985) self-determination theory and Ainsworth and Bowlby’s (1991) attachment theory. Foster care alumni are a unique sub-group who, along with other minority groups, are “missing from extensive inclusion in the literature” (p. 202) as it relates to persistence in higher education. (Metz, 2004).

Methodology: This qualitative research study employed a multiple case study methodology to generate knowledge as it related to foster care alumni experiences in college. Data Sources: For the purposes of this research, a case was defined as the experiences of each individual foster alumni student; I purposefully selected multiple cases in multiple locations in the state of Oklahoma to add depth and breadth to the data. Each individual case was also bound by time: foster alumni students graduated from Oklahoma institutions in a span of 10 years (2005-2015).

Data Analysis: MAXQDA software for qualitative research was used to organize and code the data for analysis. The coding and analysis processes resulted in qualitative themes related to the research questions.





Findings: Students attributed their abilities to persist to other people supporting and helping them. Students reported an internal desire to have a better life for themselves than their past experiences; they desired the outcomes that are more typically related to the lives of those who have college degrees. Students reported a strong need to make life better for others and to give back to others. Having a degree that allowed them to function in helping professions was important; they desired to be providers of help in contrast to recipients of help. Students were cautious about accessing formal and informal support, but once deciding help was needed, they were strategic and proactive about seeking help. Students reported that a specific need or relationship they perceived as invested in them was typically a prerequisite for seeking assistance.

Implications: This research opens the door to further examination of how a strengths-based approach in the early encounters with the higher education institutions lead to positive outcomes of foster care alumni, how a campus well versed in the significance of support networks on campus might influence retention, and how honing in on underlying motivators might contribute to persistence and completion of college for foster care alumni. Many of the participants in this research seemingly engaged in a vetting process of determining who and how they sought support from others. In considering the dismal outcomes of foster care alumni in college, it is important to consider ways to reduce the necessity for vetting of potential supports. One approach that has been implemented in some programs is the use of seasoned foster care alumni on college campuses as mentors to incoming foster care alumni students. Insider knowledge is something that would be extremely difficult

to replicate and is a characteristic that participants in this study valued when seeking out support from others.

In the lived experiences of these foster care alumni, people supporting their endeavors prior to and during college mattered. The work they are doing to give back to others matters.

Coalition-Building in Foster Care

Focus Groups

Presenters: Mathew Heard,
Jacqueline Vickery, & Brenda Sweeten

Abstract: Research on the communication of various stakeholders in foster care has focused on one group at a time, often leading to pitting needs of agencies against one another and against foster parents and foster children. In efforts to increase communication across groups that would lead to collaboration and coalition-building, we set up focus groups to learn more about the unique needs, struggles, and strengths of foster care stakeholders. We identified two primary and seemingly contradictory themes: a mutual desire to help all involved in the community and a suspicion of other stakeholders. Implications of these findings for moving communication forward and for changing interventions and policy efforts will be discussed.


Problem: Previous research on communication among foster parents, children in foster care, social workers, advocates, and others in the foster care community has primarily focused on ways particular stakeholders might benefit from interventions, such as training or policy recommendations. Although these perspectives offer useful practices, they tend to replicate existing power structures by focusing on changes at broad, programmatic levels. Given that foster parents and children have different needs than agencies, there is a need for novel approaches to communication and programmatic strategies that cut more directly to the immediate communication realities and difficult-to-express needs among all of these groups.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine how different groups of foster care stakeholders identified their communication goals and basic group identity in relation to other stakeholder groups in the foster care system. We aimed to understand how coalitions might be formed among groups that are typically portrayed as having contradictory needs and perspectives.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework: We proposed the framework of coalition-building as a way to find communication strategies that emerge in common across groups whose identities are formed in distinction to one another but who are all involved in the foster care system. As described by Karma Chávez, coalition-building offers a framework for imagining how different groups of stakeholders might begin to align their identity and goals. Coalition-building centers on understanding ways that “everyday people” and social groups learn to work together with one another to use, manipulate, and even resist the limits that are placed on them by other groups and societal structures.

Foster parents, children in foster care, and caseworkers, for example, are often entrained to be wary of one another. In the terms of coalition theory, such groups are “counter-publics,” enclaves united by the experience and identity of being set apart from the mainstream public. The benefit of coalition-building is that it frames the strategies of different enclaves not as weaknesses, but as potential sites





for identifying common goals and increasing empowerment. The potential for comradery across typical group boundaries is especially relevant to foster care stakeholders.

Methodology: We began by investigating the ways foster care stakeholders imagined their common identity and goals when gathered together in the same space. We met with 3 to 5 individuals at a time as part of a focus group and used a semi-structured interview protocol that asked questions about how participants perceived their own identities and roles, as well as how they perceived other stakeholders' identities and roles, and what they considered the greatest strengths and challenges of the foster care system.

Data Sources and Analysis: We held focus groups with two specific audiences: foster parents and CASA volunteers (volunteers who spend time with and advocate for the foster child in a particular case). Participants for each group were recruited through a convenience snowball sample in coordination with local contacts. All data was coded via qualitative analysis software.

Findings: We identified two key findings in the focus groups. First, we found at the macro-level that each group was suspicious in many ways of the identities and goals of the other groups. Foster parents were suspicious of the attention they received from caseworkers and volunteer advocates. Advocates, similarly, were suspicious of the motivations of foster parents. This finding was not surprising and, in fact, it highlights the material realities of a system that has too few foster parents, too many foster children, and too heavy of a caseload for volunteers. These groups are often formed rapidly and pulled apart just as rapidly, with reasons and justifications rarely known or supplied. Second, and more surprisingly, we found that kernels of coalition-building already existed among the groups that we interviewed. During the

focus groups, the foster parents and advocates showed solidarity with one another and a surprising degree of support for other groups against whom they were typically identified as entangled. Parents, for instance, commented on the difficulties faced by social workers, and volunteer advocates recognized that most of the foster parents they talked to wanted to do the best they could for the children in their care.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Overall, with the kernels for coalition-building already in place, we believe that groups of foster care stakeholders can be motivated to support one another and understand one another in local communities with small interventions such as making space for groups to talk to one another and listen to the identities and goals each other group supports. Foster care alumni have a particularly important role to play in such coalitions since they are well positioned as adults to speak to their experiences within local communities of foster parents, social workers, and other stakeholders. To amplify the coalition-building taking place, we envision engaging in further research with local populations of foster alumni to develop more open communication, goal setting, and opportunities for achievement for foster youth served by local foster systems.

Conclusions: While the problems of foster care will not be solved by the simple step of getting groups together to talk with one another, our study suggests that framing the communication patterns of different groups as coalitional rather than adversarial can provide a crucial opening for groups to recognize their common goals and identities. We hope such coalition building will improve how resources are utilized and delivered, and we believe this could have a great impact.

Education Fostering Risk or Resilience: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Campus-Based Support for Students with Experience in Foster Care

Presenter: Angela Hoffman

Abstract: Through critical discourse analysis (CDA) this study examines how campus support program (CSP) websites construct the identity of students with experience in foster care through discourse. An analysis of nine program websites suggest that discourse can reproduce or resist dominant narratives that socially construct the identity of students with foster care experience.

Problem: When youth enter foster care, they experience dehumanization through the loss of personal identity as a primary stigmatized status of “foster youth” is conferred by the child welfare system and society (Kools, 1997, 1999). Youth in foster care often experience a diminished level of power and are subjected to negative stereotypes that are communicated through lowered expectations and statements of ridicule (Bruskas, 2008; Kools, 1997, 1999). The experience of foster care and the exposure to the corresponding stigma is believed to be a unique trauma that influences identity development and the educational attainment of youth with foster care experience (Hiles, Moss, Thorne, Write, & Dallos, 2017; Kools, 1997, 1999; McMurray, Connolly, & Preston-Shott, 2011; Randolph & Thompson, 2017; Samuels & Pryce, 2008).

While the vast majority of youth with foster care experience have aspirations of going to college, nationally only 1-5% complete a Bachelor’s degree (Pecora et al., 2006; Wolanin, 2005). As a result, many higher education institutions have created CSPs to provide resources to improve college access, retention, degree attainment, and overall wellbeing for this population (Casey Family Programs, 2010; Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Okpych, 2012).

Relatedly, research has explored opportunities to implement strengths-based approaches that support youth with foster care experience in identifying strengths rather than using negative assumptions or deficit frameworks as the model for program services (Hass, Allen, & Amoah, 2014; Hass & Graydon, 2009; Salazar, Jones, Emerson, & Mucha, 2016). Some CSPs use strengths approaches to support students with experience in foster care and have found positive outcomes for their identity development and academic achievement (Geiger, Piel, Day, & Schelbe, 2017; Watt, Norton & Jones, 2013).

As CSPs were created to support students with experience in foster care they are uniquely positioned to highlight the strengths of this population and create narratives that can support positive identity development and educational attainment. In particular, the websites of CSPs are a public virtual space with the content reaching many constituents. To examine if CSPs are applying a strengths perspective to their contributions to public discourse I used CDA to examine how CSPs socially construct the identity of students with experience in foster care through the discourse on their websites.



Theoretical Framework: The theoretical frameworks of this study were the strengths perspective and CDA. The strengths perspective is the process of identifying and implementing the strengths a person possesses as a means of promoting empowerment, possibility, hope for the future, and goal attainment (Saleebey, 1996; 2000). Saleebey (2000) asserts that hope can be established through the strengths perspective by conferring agent status onto individuals through the identification of personal strengths, goals, and identification of pathways to achieve dreams. CDA is concerned with relationships between power, dominance, and discourse and it seeks to expose inequality that is perpetrated and substantiated within discourse (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 2015). With such emancipatory goals, van Dijk (2015) characterized CDA as a social movement of researchers who seek to understand how power and marginalization are “enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk” (p. 466). CDA can also amplify the narratives of strength of the marginalized (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; van Dijk, 2015).

Methodology: A qualitative CDA was conducted during spring 2018. Purposive sampling was used to limit the sample to nine websites of CSPs at four-year public universities in one Midwest state. I created PDF versions of every webpage on the nine websites and transcribed the audio of videos included on webpages. I maintained a research journal throughout analysis to engage in reflexivity to consider how my positioning as a foster scholar, a staff member of a CSP, and as a person with foster care experience shaped my subjective reaction to the text.

Data Analysis: I drew on the CDA guidelines and techniques of Huckin (1997) to conduct data analysis. This method requires first reading the text of all web pages without engaging in guided analysis. Next, I analyzed the text using Huckin’s (1997) guidelines for framing the text and considering discursive techniques. I created a CDA worksheet for each CSP website to track discursive practice identified in the analysis. The

completed CDA worksheets served as a profile of each CSP website. I reviewed each profile for themes within and across the websites, specifically attending to the interaction of text, discursive practices, and social context.

The discourse of the nine CSP websites varied greatly, yet there were three themes that were interconnected: engagement of a strengths perspective, agency of students, and students as the audience. The findings suggest that the discourse on CSP websites has the capacity to construct the identity of students with experience in foster care in ways that can reproduce or resist dominant deficit narratives. While some discourse on the websites was grounded in a strengths perspective other discourse perpetuated or (re)produced deficit perspectives. Citing of statistics on the outcomes of students with experience in foster care were often used to frame the purpose of the CSP or to encourage donations to the program but contribute to a deficit dominant narrative.

Findings: The findings of this study are significant as students with experience in foster care are underrepresented in higher education and dominant narratives in research agendas, policy, and practice tend to focus on the adverse outcomes of foster care in a way that places blame and stigma on youth. The frameworks of CDA and the strengths perspective hold promise for identifying when deficit narratives are being recreated and how those can be challenged by highlighting the strengths of students with experience in foster care. This study provides insights into how CSPs may support positive identity development and educational attainment through strengths-based discourse on their websites.

Marginalized Positionalities of Self-Shaping: Experiences of Emancipated Foster Care, Transgender, First generation College Students

Presenters: Jacob Okumu & Kay-Anne P. Darlington


Abstract: This study explores the intersectionality of marginalized identities of emancipated foster care, transgender, first-generation students transitioning into college campus environment and how such an environment impacts their personal growth and development. Using a case study approach, we examine how the encompassing nature of identity is complicated by layering emancipated foster care, transgender, first-generation students' positionality of self-shaping within a college campus environment. Applying the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), the study explores how first-generation, transgender college students cope with the legacy of foster care, the challenging aspects of intersecting marginalized identities, and the jarring consequences for college student developmental programming and initiatives.

Problem: Many programs on college campuses aim to meet the developmental needs of students who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ). In many instances, these student populations are stigmatized for presenting identities and social roles that do not conform to conventional gender expectations (Lombardi, 2009; Nuru, 2014). These students' needs and issues are often looked at from the perspective of their LGBTQ identity or their first-generation experience or (much less likely) their foster care legacies. As a result, there is little room for specifically addressing the unique needs and experiences of those who have foster care experience, are LGBTQ and are first-generation college students. Indeed, on most college campuses, the services for each of those groups are fragmented and un-integrated. Such constraints present

innumerable challenges as students navigate gender identity, conflicting self-concepts, the enactment of self, and the role of oneself in relation to others. This facilitates further marginalization of students who cope with the legacy of foster care, are first-generation, and identify as LGBTQ. Though there is some research on first generation, transgender and other LGBTQ students in college (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis & Tubbs, 2005; Davidson, 2016; Griner et al., 2017; Jehangir, Stebleton, & Deenanath, 2015; Oswalt & Lederer, 2017), the intersectionality of marginalized identities of emancipated foster care, transgender, and first-generation college students have not been explored.

Theoretical Framework: This study utilizes the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) conceptual network that is based on the assumption that communication, our relationships, and our communities are central components in our identity development (Hecht, 1993; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2004). CTI identifies four loci of identity that intersect at multiple levels: personal, relational, enacted, and communal. In that context, individuals internalize various social relations and roles through communication. Those identities are, in turn, enacted as social behavior. In being dynamically dialectical, CTI focuses more on mutual influences between identity and communication, and subsequently conceptualizes identity development as communication rather than as a product of communication (Hecht et al., 2003).





Methodology: CTI integrates the self, relationships, society, and communication as intersecting loci for identity. In as much as these loci of identity are inseparable and complementary, understandings of identity may shift among and between different levels and contexts. As a result, we have to negotiate tensions between different layers to conceptualize our identity (Hecht et al., 2005; Wadsworth, Hecht & Jung, 2008). Nonetheless, all four frames assist us in better understanding of both ourselves and others as we experience our social world (Hecht et al., 2003). Using a case study approach and the CTI conceptual framework, the study highlights how first-generation, transgender college students with a legacy of foster care navigate multiple marginalized, and at times invisible identities while transitioning into a four-year public, four-year institution.

Findings/Implications: This study highlights three specific areas of consideration within the college student developmental paradigms. First, the centrality of intersecting identities as emancipated foster care, transgender, first generation students are largely influenced by situational contexts. Secondly, the observed emerging different identities appear to be more salient when they intersect with other aspects of life experiences such as medical history, lack of family ties, socio-economic challenges, and gender while transitioning into the college campus environment. The study also reveals an interplay and impact of the dynamics of privilege associated with being heterosexual and having connectedness to a family that also went to college.

Moreover, the findings reveal that college students are likely to reveal and enact their identities with and among those who also share their life experiences. Educators must therefore need to be aware of the marginalized and challenging intersecting identities that students bring to college. This entails intentionally observing and listening to the verbal and non-verbal cues that students communicate in various campus contexts as they grow and develop. Although some institutions are intentionally responding to the developmental needs of underrepresented and often underserved college students, these efforts do not seem to have obvious positive impacts.

The experiences of the students in this case study also demonstrate the complexity of negotiating multiple intersecting identities and the marginalization of some college students. Educators need to extend the discourse on diversity in all possible fronts. One way of consolidating that effort is to marshal faculty and staff to revamp and transform their curriculum, pedagogy, and student developmental interventions to include the connectedness of the discourse of privilege and diversity enacted in various identity negotiations. That discourse ought to incorporate a more nuanced approach that goes beyond issues of culture, difference and the interplay of power. If we only focus on the salient identity markers then our college curriculum, pedagogy and student developmental initiatives will continue to privilege certain students over others and subsequently further marginalize those who already feel disenfranchised and marginalized.

Looking beyond graduation: Experiences of former foster youth and homeless students who were involved in a campus-based support program

Presenters: Lisa Schelbe & Lisa Jackson

Abstract: Campus-based support programs can enhance foster student success. However, little is known about outcomes of students after graduation. How do students with a history of foster care or homelessness who participated in a campus-based support program fare after graduation? This study surveys 31 students at graduation, 6 months post-graduation, and one-year post-graduation to explore their experiences. Findings indicate that at graduation, students have post-graduation plans and are optimistic. At follow-up, graduates identified obstacles including finances and lack of support. Study findings have implications for preparing students with a history of foster care and homelessness for life after graduation.


Problem: Increasingly campus-based support programs are assisting students with a history of foster care or homelessness thrive in college. The research on such programs is limited and little is known about how graduates of these programs fare immediately after leaving college. The transition from college after graduation can be a challenging time. Those who are foster care alumni and those experiencing homelessness may have limited support and unique transitions following graduation.

Theoretical Framework: This exploratory study was atheoretical. Principles guiding the study use a strength perspective and focus on student empowerment.

Methodology: The study was a mixed methods study where members of nine cohorts of students across three years complete online surveys at graduation, 6 months after graduation, and one year after graduation. The surveys consisted of open-ended questions as well as a few Likert scale and yes/no questions.

Data Analysis: Data analysis was basic descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.





Findings: The sample included 31 students who graduated from Florida State University and had participated in the Unconquered Scholars Program, a campus-based support program for students with a history of foster care or who are experiencing homelessness. Student were predominantly female (81%). Sixty-five percent were African American and 19% were white. Thirteen percent identified as Latino/Hispanic.

At graduation, on average, students report being engaged (frequently/many times using programs) with programs and found the programs fairly to very helpful. Most students reported post-graduation plans that often included employment, graduate school, or service opportunities. When it came to feeling prepared for life after graduation, there was a range in responses. The vast majority of students felt fairly prepared with a minority feeling completely, somewhat, or not at all. About half the students reported feeling completely competent to find a job they were suited for after graduation. Very few said they were not at all confident about this. Students described the elements of the campus-based support program as helpful and suggested additional support and assistance with post-graduation plans. During the follow-up, when asked what they would like to change in their lives right now, there was a consistent theme about the finances, specifically not having enough money and living paycheck to paycheck. Specific post-graduation obstacles were mentioned related to money, starting over with few connections, and adjusting to working. Students valued the campus-based support programs, especially the support, relationships, and resources. While the students had plans at graduation, after graduation they mentioned stress related to finances and isolation. Graduates expressed that they could have been better prepared for life after graduation.

Implications: Campus-based support programs may be able to increase student success during college and play a role in preparing students for life after graduation. These programs may be able to assist with transition through ensuring students are adequately prepared to handle life on their own. Specifically, development in the areas of money management, networking, and developing a strong support system should be prioritized for graduates. Students may leave the university without the skills and resources necessary to succeed. Students who are foster care alumni or have history of homelessness may benefit from additional supports and resources.

The Texas Tuition and Fee Waiver Program for Youth Experiencing Foster Care: An Assessment of Waiver Utilization and Impact

Presenter: Toni Watt


Abstract: Approximately 23 states have legislated a tuition waiver for foster youth. However, little information is available about the efficacy of waiver programs. Texas has one of the oldest and largest tuition waiver programs, providing a useful case study of waiver impact. This study uses a unique data set of 4,263 youth formerly in care in Texas. Higher education outcomes of these youth were tracked from age 18 to 24. Findings revealed that waivers are underutilized and identify correlates of waiver utilization. In addition, results demonstrated that, if accessed, waivers can significantly and substantively improve post-secondary graduation rates for foster youth.

Problem: Currently 23 states have legislated tuition waivers for foster care alumni (FCA). Waivers are intuitively appealing. However, there has been very little research on their effectiveness. Of the research that has been conducted, findings suggest that waivers may not have had the level of impact presumed. Hernandez, Day, and Henson (2017) found that most of the waiver programs are written so narrowly that they serve a very small number of youth. However, they also found that Texas, one of the first states to adopt a tuition and fee waiver in 1993, distributes more waivers than any other state. Thus, Texas makes for an interesting case study of the potential of a long-standing and broadly defined waiver program.

In 2016, the Texas legislature required the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to track higher education outcomes of former foster youth. A unique data set was produced which contained the academic records of former foster youth followed from age 18 to 24 (2009-2015).

This created an opportunity for the first assessment of the state waiver. DFPS produced aggregate summary statistics from these data and allowed our research team to publish the findings (Watt, Faulkner, Bustillos, & Madden, 2019). In this descriptive study, we learned that despite the state tuition and fee waiver, post-secondary accomplishments of former foster youth are low. Only 3.5% of the youth attained a post-secondary credential by the age of 24. We also found that a sizable percentage of FCA did not use the waiver, but those who use the waiver had higher graduation rates than those who didn't use the waiver. However, there were a number of limitations to the data that kept us from being able to confirm or elaborate on these hypotheses. Namely we did not have a measure of waiver eligibility and we did not have access to the individual level data for multivariate analyses. Fortunately, DFPS/THECB conducted a second data pull. In this second phase, additional variables were included (e.g. waiver eligibility, college readiness) and our research team was allowed access to the individual level data. In the proposed study, we provide our analysis of this new data set. Our research questions were: 1) What are the waiver utilization rates of youth who enroll in higher education, 2) What types of youth are most/least likely to use the waiver, and 3) What is the impact of the waiver on graduation rates when controlling for demographic and academic factors?





Data Analysis: Our data include 4,263 youth who were in the foster care system in Texas. These youth turned age 18 in 2010 and were followed until age 24 (until 2016). We conducted univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses of the data using Stata 15.1. Our multivariate analyses used Generalized Mixed Methods Models (GLMM) to account for the nesting of students in schools.

Findings: Key findings revealed that a large percentage of youth who enroll in higher education and who qualify for the waiver do not use it (41%). We can think of no reason why a youth would not want to use the waiver. We found that students in four-year universities relative to community colleges were more likely to use the waiver. Those who graduated high school rather than obtaining a GED were also more likely to use the waiver. Finally, youth who emancipated from care had higher utilization rates relative to those from other placement types (e.g. adoption). We found no differences in waiver utilization by gender, race/ethnicity, college readiness, or college GPA. In our final model, we examined whether the waiver impacts the odds of graduation from a four-year university when controlling for waiver eligibility, gender, race/ethnicity, college readiness, and college GPA. Our results reveal a significant and substantive impact of the waiver. Youth who used the waiver were four times more likely to graduate than youth who did not use the waiver. These findings provide the first quantitative evidence of the potential benefit and the magnitude of the effect a waiver can have on post-secondary outcomes of foster youth.

Implications: Our research has implications for policy and practice. First, the results suggest that states (and college campuses) where waivers are in place need to devote considerable attention to waiver utilization. It is of little benefit to have a state legislated waiver if students are not aware of, or able to easily access the waiver. Second, data on the benefit of tuition waivers for improving post-secondary outcomes needs to be shared so that states can make data driven decisions about whether to keep or adopt a tuition waiver for foster youth. In sum, waiver programs appear to be a viable option for improving post-secondary outcomes of FCA. However, states must attend to the execution of these programs and evaluate their impact.

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