



**CHAPIN HALL**  
CENTER FOR CHILDREN  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

## **Evaluating Campus Support Programs in California and Washington State**

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### **Why do we need campus support programs?**

- Foster youth are less likely to pursue post-secondary education than other young adults, even if they have a high school diploma
- Many foster youth do have aspirations to pursue post-secondary education, but they face multiple barriers
- Efforts to increase opportunities for post-secondary education have focused on financial barriers
  - Federal Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)
  - State tuition waiver programs and designated scholarships
- Non-financial needs, such as academic, housing and social supports, have generally not been addressed



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### **What do we know about campus support programs?**

- Review of 5 “college success” programs that provide services and supports to former foster youth (Pontecorvo, El-Askari & Putnam, 2006)
  - Higher rates of retention and graduation among former foster youth who participated in the programs than among those who did not or among other EOP students
  - Programs perceived as participants’ sole source of support and provided a sense of belonging to a family or community
- Pilot study of 7 scholarship programs that provide financial support and support services to former foster youth as part of the Foster Care Alumni Scholarship Benchmarking Network data sharing initiative (Schultz & Mueller, 2008)
  - Web-based survey to collect program-level data and individual-level data for the 5 most recent cohorts of scholarship recipients
  - Most programs had difficulty providing requested information, particularly data on academic performance



### **Why is a comprehensive and methodologically sound impact evaluation needed?**

- Studies have examined a limited number of programs
- Not clear which program components higher retention or graduation rates should be attributed to
- Analyses have not controlled for participant characteristics that might account for observed differences between their outcomes and the outcomes of non-participants or other comparison groups
- Particularly important given the growing numbers of programs being implemented and former foster youth being served



**What questions need to be answered before undertaking an impact evaluation?**

- Questions about the program’s **implementation**
  - What services are being provided and by whom?
  - How many former foster youth are being served?
  - How much does implementation vary across sites?
- Questions about the program’s **evaluability**
  - What is the program model?
  - What are the program’s goals?
  - What data are being collected (or obtained from other sources) about the receipt of services and supports or participant outcomes?
- Research funded by the Walter S. Johnson and Stuart Foundations to address these questions
  - Telephone interviews with program administrators
  - Web-based survey of program participants



**Telephone Survey of Program Administrators**

- Interviewed administrators from 10 campus support programs that were fully implemented by the start of the 2006-2007 academic year

College/University	Program
<b>Washington State</b>	
• College Success Foundation	• Governor’s Scholarship
• Seattle University	• Fostering Scholars
<b>Northern California</b>	
• San Francisco State	• Guardian Scholars
• UC Santa Cruz	• Smith Renaissance Society
• San José State	• Connect, Motivate & Educate Society
• Cal State East Bay	• Renaissance Scholars
<b>Southern California</b>	
• Cal Poly Pomona	• Renaissance Scholars
• Cal State Fullerton	• Guardian Scholars
• UC Irvine	• Guardian Scholars
• Orange Coast Community College	• Guardian Scholars



### **Web-based Survey of Program Participants**

- Focus on respondents' experiences with and perceptions of their campus support program
- Questions were informed by interviews with administrators and primarily close-ended, but respondents were given some opportunities to answer in their own words
- Provided administrators with the survey's URL and an email inviting participants to complete it
- 98 participants, representing 8 of the 10 programs, completed the survey and each received a \$25 incentive payment



What did the administrators tell us about their campus support programs?



### **Do the programs have a set of common goals?**

- Increase opportunities for former foster youth to pursue higher education
- Increase college retention and graduation among former foster youth by providing the financial, academic, social/emotional, and logistical supports they need to succeed in school



### **How much variation exists across programs?**

- Is the program tied to a particular campus or does it operate statewide?
- Does the program serve all eligible students or is there an application and selection process?
- Do students receive a scholarship or only non-financial supports?
- Does the program primarily make referrals to other campus resources or does it provide some services directly?
- Is the program independent or part of another programs that targets “disadvantaged” populations?



## What are the major challenges facing campus support programs?

- **Identifying eligible students**
  - Question on the FAFSA (or EOP application) was the only systematic way to identify eligible students
  - Flagging question recently added to admissions application for California's public colleges and universities
- **Recruitment**
  - Considerable resources devoted to outreach activities
  - Yet, the pool of potential applicants is relatively stable because the academic records of many foster are so poor that they cannot be admitted even conditionally---and even community college may be beyond reach
- **Post-secondary education not encouraged**
  - Concern about foster youth not being given information about college admissions requirements and not being encouraged to submit college applications
  - Provide foster youth with information about other programs and encourage them to apply to more than one school



## What are the major challenges facing campus support programs?

- **Students not prepared for college level work**
  - High percentage of students required to take remedial courses (estimates range from 50% to nearly 100%), and remedial courses don't count toward college credit
  - One reason for mandatory Summer Bridge, a rigorous academic "boot camp" prior to the start of freshman year
- **Retention**
  - Students drop out for academic, financial or personal/family reasons
  - Programs may continue to work with these students so that they can be re-admitted if they left in good academic standing
- **Long-term financial sustainability**
  - Funding from private philanthropy, corporate and individual donors, and some county independent living skills programs
  - Schools often provide in-kind funding such as office space or cover the costs of director and staff salaries
  - Concern about funding once start-up grants expire



## What are the major challenges facing campus support programs?

- **Housing**
  - Primarily an issue for programs at community colleges which do not provide on-campus housing
  - If students have no option but to live far away from campus, transportation becomes an issue
  - Year-round housing is critical because many former foster youth have no where to go during the summer and winter/spring breaks
- **Need for mental health services**
  - Concern about the adverse impact of mental health problems on academic progress
  - Limited number of sessions available through student counseling services
  - Paying for community-based services if referral is made
  - Some students must overcome distrust of the mental health profession



What did the young people tell us about their campus support programs?



## Who responded to the survey?

		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Female	77	78.6
	Male	21	21.4
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	African American	31	31.6
	Latino/Hispanic	22	22.4
	Caucasian/White	22	22.4
	Biracial/Multiracial	11	11.2
	Other/Missing	12	12.2
<b>Age in years</b>	18 or 19	46	46.9
	20 or 21	29	29.6
	At least 22	23	23.4

- Predominantly female and students of color
- Fairly representative of program participants based on demographic data administrators reported



## In which campus support program were respondents enrolled?

College/University	Program	#	%
Cal Poly Pomona	Renaissance Scholars	18	18.4
College Success Foundation	Governor's Scholarship	17	17.3
Cal State Fullerton	Guardian Scholars	15	15.3
San Francisco State	Guardian Scholars	13	13.3
San José State	Connect, Motivate and Educate Society	13	13.3
Cal State East Bay	Renaissance Scholars	11	11.2
Orange Coast Community College	Guardian Scholars	6	6.1
Seattle University	Fostering Scholars	5	5.1

- Not necessarily proportional to size of program



## How did respondents learn about the program?

	#	%
Contacted by program staff	42	42.9
Independent living program	39	39.8
Social worker/caseworker	33	33.7
Current or former program participant	29	29.6
From college/university admissions material	27	27.6
Private agency	26	26.5
High school teacher, guidance counselor or principal	17	17.3
Contacted by someone from financial aid office	10	10.2
Contacted by someone from the admissions office	4	4.1

Note: Respondents could report learning about the program from more than one source.

- Most likely to have learned about the program from staff or from someone connected to the child welfare system
- High schools were not a major referral source



## What services and supports did respondents receive from the program and how important to their success in school were they perceived to be?

	#	%	Important or Very Important (% of recipients)
Academic supports	83	84.7	-----
Sense of family/community	81	86.2	77.5
Financial aid	74	75.5	98.6
Housing	65	66.3	96.9
Leadership development opportunities	61	64.2	47.9
Mentoring	55	58.5	51.0
Priority enrollment	46	48.9	47.0
Summer Bridge	45	47.9	38.8

- Most likely to have received academic supports and social support
- Financial aid and housing assistance perceived to be the most important
- Summer Bridge not perceived as important by most



**What academic supports did respondents receive from the program and how important to their success in school were they perceived to be?**

	#	%	Important or Very Important (% of recipients)
Help choosing courses	60	62.5	93.3
Tutoring	58	60.4	60.3
Access to a dedicated computer lab	56	58.3	75.0
Study skills training	53	55.2	54.7
Help choosing a major	35	36.5	91.4
Entry level exam preparation	28	29.2	53.5
Graduate school advising	27	28.1	70.3
Graduate/professional school exam preparation	13	13.5	76.9
Assistance related to a learning or other disability*	5	50.0	100.0

\*Of the 10 respondents who reported having a learning or other disability.

- Help choosing courses and/or a major were perceived as the most important academic supports (along with assistance related to a disability for students who reported one)



**What did financial aid provided by the program pay for?**

N = 73	Frequency	Percentage
Tuition	54	74.0
Room and board	53	72.6
Books	56	76.7
School supplies	53	72.6
Emergency needs	42	57.5
Laptop/computer	20	27.4



**What type of housing assistance did respondents receive?**

N = 65	Frequency	Percentage
On-campus housing	58	89.2
Off-campus housing	17	26.2
Winter and spring break housing	43	66.2
Housing during the summer	43	66.2



**How frequently did respondents have contact with program staff?**

	In-Person		By Email or Phone	
	#	%	#	%
At least once a week	40	40.8	42	42.8
Several times a semester, trimester or quarter	40	40.8	44	44.9
Once a semester, trimester or quarter	7	7.1	4	4.1
Never	6	6.1	3	3.1
Missing	5	5.1	5	5.1

- Students who reported frequent in-person contact also reported frequent contact by phone and e-mail
- 88% regarded the assistance they have received from program staff as being helpful or very helpful



## How likely are respondents to recommend the program to other foster youth?

	Frequency	Percentage
Very likely	81	82.7
Likely	5	5.1
Somewhat likely	7	7.1
Not very likely	0	0
Missing	5	5.1
Total	98	100.0



## Why did respondents become program participants?

### Financial aid

*My dream since I was a kid has been to attend college, however I knew I couldn't afford it and would have to rely on scholarships and loans. When I heard about the [campus support] program I applied because it was a scholarship to a very good school where I knew I would receive an excellent education. Also, the scholarship was appealing because it provided me with all the things I needed being an independent student. Plus, it is a full ride scholarship!*

### Help achieving educational goals

*I became a [program participant] because it will assist and guide me throughout my years in college for students such as myself who has come from a background of being in the foster youth system. Its also allowed me to have a equal opportunity to achieve my goals just as any other student who is pursuing a college degree.*

### Social support

*I became a [program participant] because they are a support system for me academically as well as personally.*

### Being with others from similar backgrounds

*I felt that being surrounded by people of the same background would help to motivate me in a way that I would feel I was not the only one. I knew that they would understand my background and help direct me and guild me in the best possible way*



## What services or supports did respondents need or need more of?

### Housing

*I think that for me feeling secure about where I'm going to live is always in the back of my head. Currently I attend [college] and I'm planning on transferring to [another college], the only thing that has stopped me is that I don't know if I'll be okay. I don't know if I'll have a roof over my head. And that is very scary to think about. I think particularly if you get accepted into the [campus support program], you should be guaranteed a spot in the dorm rooms.*

### Graduate school advising

*Resources in the university especially when students are interested of pursuing Masters degree. We should have a counselor from the department of our majors to talk to and get guidance.*

### Financial aid and help with living expenses

*With the rising cost of living there would be much more financial aid needed.*



## What were the most significant challenges respondents faced during the transition from foster care to college?

### Adjusting to college

*Beginning classes at a new school, in a new town. Adjusting to college life and the difficulty of classes.*

### Housing

*Making sure I had a place to live especially during the times where there was no school.*

### Being on own and feeling alone

*Feeling emotionally ready to be an adult and live on my own. There is an incredible feeling of "aloneness" during this transition.*

### Balancing work and school

*Managing going to school full time as well as working as much as possible to be able to support myself and pay for my bills.*



**How did the campus support program help respondents cope with or overcome these challenges?**

**Sense of community or family**

*They gave me a sense of belonging because the [campus support program] is known to be family, by letting all the students [know] that they are not alone.*

**Counseling or advise**

*Gives me great advice every time I approach with issues that I need assistance with.*

**Social support**

*They provided a...nurturing environment on campus, I felt emotionally safe and felt that someone cared, The emotional support was very important, and having talks with the program directors on-campus really helped.*

**Belief in youth**

*A group of people who...believe that you can be somebody even though all your life somebody may have told you that you couldn't.*



**How might the campus support program have helped respondents cope with or overcome these challenges?**

**NOTHING---most frequent response**

**Sense of needing to deal with problems on their own and hence not asking for help**

*It was my fault because I didn't asked anybody in the office about my situation; however, I want to take the challenge and do everything I can on own.*

*I'm not too sure that they could have done anything about it. Personal problems have to be dealt with on ones own.*

*Well they didn't really know about it but if I had told them I needed help moving in maybe they could have had some people help me.*



**What is the best part about being a campus support program participant ?**

**Sense of family**

*The students get to build a family within the [campus support program]. We get to support each other and the [campus support program] staff and sponsors are our parents in school so they look after us like a family does for their children.*

**Social support**

Knowing that at anytime if I have a problem there is someone who is concerned and will be there to help me.

**Financial aid**

*Being able to attend school without the stress of trying to pay for it. Being able to attend college in the first place, because without the scholarship I wouldn't be furthering my education.*

**Feeling understood**

*Having adults and other students who understand what you're going through and feel like.*



**What about the program would respondents recommend changing?**

**NOTHING---most frequent response**

**More financial aid**

*Perhaps being able to offer more funding for students, because while my scholarship is enough for tuition it doesn't help much with living expenses.*

**More opportunities to interact with other participants**

*I would love more reunions with students of the program, since they are my support and community.*

**More opportunities for student input**

*Monthly gathering for [program participants] and staff would be helpful so that scholars could voice their concern and shares experiences.*



## What did the administrators tell us about program-related data?



### What data are programs collecting?

- Several programs maintain a customized database to track student progress (e.g., GPA, course grades, courses taken, major, credits)
- Programs were much less likely to track the receipt of services or supports, but there were a few exceptions
- Program directors described their database as a “work in progress” and/or noted that they are in the process of developing a comprehensive database
- Some programs have access to a campus-wide system (including high school transcripts, SAT/ACT scores) whereas others must submit a specific request
- Other sources include reports from college mentor coordinators and mid-semester grade reports from professors



### How are programs using these data?

- Monitor academic progress
  - Are students meeting academic requirements?
  - Are students on track to graduate within five years?
- End of year reporting to funders (which means that programs tracks what foundations want to know)
- Research and program evaluation (e.g., assessment tool to compare the backgrounds of former foster youth who go to college to the backgrounds of those who do not)
- Identify gaps in financial aid packages
- Help students decide on a career path
- Programs that collect data on service receipt have not made much use of those data



What are the implications of this research for conducting an impact evaluation?



### **What are the major challenges associated with conducting an impact evaluation?**

- Must be able to identify former foster youth at schools with campus support programs and to distinguish between participants and non-participants
- Program participants may be different from non-participants in ways that are correlated with outcomes
- Different programs are collecting (or have access to) different data, and relatively few are systematically tracking the provision of services and supports
- Variation across programs makes it difficult to know what observed differences in outcomes should be attributed to
  - Important because some programs may not have the resources to provide the full range of financial, academic, and emotional supports



### **Can an impact evaluation be developed around Cal-PASS?**

- California Partnership for Achieving Student Success (Cal-PASS) is data warehouse that links student educational records across K-12, community college and four-year institutions
- Current members include 88% of the community colleges, 74% of the California State Universities, 70% of the Universities of California, and 4 private post-secondary schools
- Database could be used to assess the effects of campus support programs on the educational outcomes of former foster youth if
  - Programs are located at Cal-PASS member institutions
  - Former foster youth can be identified
  - Program participants can be “flagged” by their schools
  - Program data can be linked to Cal-PASS data



**What are the major barriers to conducting an impact evaluation using Cal-PASS?**

- Records for community college members are automatically uploaded but four-year schools must initiate data uploads (and most do not)
- Program directors recognized how data can be used to help improve their programs, but are less interested in a centralized database like Cal-PASS which is better suited for program evaluation than real-time monitoring (Price, 2008)
- Customized databases used to monitor the receipt of services and supports so the data are not consistent across programs
- Access to individual-level records from the Cal-PASS database may not be feasible due to FERPA concerns

