College Opportunities for Foster Youth: Overcoming Barriers and Providing Support
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Agenda

- Introductions
- Background on Foster Youth
- Barriers to College
- College Going Process
- Supporting Foster Youth
- Questions
Introductions

- Ashley Clayton, Ph.D.
  - Assistant Professor, Higher Education, Louisiana State University
  - Research Interests: college access & success for underserved students
  - Previously worked in Undergraduate Admissions & TRIO Upward Bound

- Audience
  - Foster parents
  - Social workers and counselors
  - Education professionals
  - Others?
Background on Foster Youth
Foster Care in the United States

- Foster care refers to the formal and informal care of children outside of their own biological home.
- More than 430,000 youth are currently in foster care
- Youth spend on average 2-3 years on foster care
- There are over 4,700 foster children in Louisiana alone, and more than half of these children are under the age of five

Outcomes of Foster Youth

- **Reunification**
  - Process of returning children from foster care to their biological families
  - Primary goal and most common outcome

- **Legal Adoption**
  - Second most common outcome
  - Approximately 50,000 foster youth are adopted each year

- **Long-term Care (Aging Out)**
  - When reunification and adoption are unsuccessful
  - In 2016, over 20,000 foster youth aged out of the system

Barriers to College for Foster Youth
Historical Lens of College Access (Exclusion)

- “Our history of access mirrors our less frequently noted history of exclusion. Quite literally and with few exceptions, many colleges were closed to women, religious minorities, immigrants and Black [students] through much of the 19th and early 20th centuries.” (Daun-Barnett et al., 2014, p. 20)

- While access to postsecondary education has increased for many populations, there are still large gaps in both college access and attainment for low-income students and foster youth.
Educational Outcomes

- Only 50% of foster care youth earn a high school diploma
- Only 3% earned a bachelor's degree
  - This outcome has been consistent for the past two decades
- Many foster youth do not see postsecondary education as a realistic option beyond high school

Source: Education Commission of the States (2016)
Barriers to Higher Education for Foster Youth

- Youth in foster care and foster care alumni are among the most marginalized student populations

- Foster youth face personal, social, financial and systemic issues that hinder their success, including postsecondary enrollment and attainment

- Foster youth sometimes experience disruptions in educational development as a result of numerous transitions

Source: Education Commission of the States (2016)
Challenges in Navigating College Options

- **Lack of Support**
  - Youth in foster care cannot turn to their parents for college information, college application assistance, or financial and emotional support
  - They might not have much assistance and support to go to college from other adults in their life

- **Unprepared for College-level Work**
  - Changing K-12 schools
  - Attend low-performing schools
  - Tracked into basic courses instead of college preparatory

Source: American Council on Education (2017)
Aspirations to Attainment – Gaps Remain

- Foster youth are **as likely to have college aspirations** as their peers.
- Foster youth are **less likely to enroll in college** compared to their peers.
- Once enrolled, foster care alumni are **less likely to graduate** compared to their peers.

Source: American Council on Education (2017)
“For the past several years, one of the fastest-growing groups of children entering foster care has been those ages 14-17. The state's goal for the majority of them is to find an "Alternative Permanent Living Arrangement." It means that reunification with a child's parents, placement with a relative, adoption or legal guardianship all have been ruled out and the child is expected to stay in foster care until he or she becomes an adult. As a result, the child's 18th birthday often marks the end of any support.

National statistics show that, without support, these children are almost 50 percent less likely to obtain their high school diploma by 19, and only 3 percent have earned college degrees by 25 (compared to 28 percent of everybody else). Within a year of exiting care, one in five is homeless. Within two years, one in four is incarcerated. And the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder is 21.5 percent -- five times higher than average, higher even than that of American war veterans. About half are unemployed. Those are national statistics. The numbers in New Orleans are worse.”

Written by: Judge Ernestine S. Gray and Joy M. Bruce
College Going Process
Types of Colleges

- College vs. University
- Funding
  - Public
  - Private
  - For-Profit
- Demographics
  - Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)
  - Predominately White Institutions (PWI)
  - Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI)
- Location (In-state vs. Out-of State)
- Size
Admissions Process

**Required Materials:**
- Application (Online or Paper)
- Transcripts
- Testing
  - SAT
  - ACT
- Essays & Personal Statements
- Letters of Recommendation
Types of Financial Aid

“FREE” Money:

- **Grants** do not have to be repaid (they are often called “gift aid”)

- **Work-study** is money earned by the student at a job (often on campus) that helps the student pay his or her educational expenses. This money does not have to be repaid.

- **Scholarships** are usually based on academic merit but can be based on a student’s interests, hobbies, religion, ethnicity, and/or financial need.

Money that has to be repaid:

- **Loans**
Applying for Financial Aid

**Federal Student Aid**: Fill out Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at www.fafsa.ed.gov
- The FAFSA will calculate your EFC (Expected Family Contribution)
- This information is sent to the schools you select
- Receive a Financial Aid Award Letter

**State Aid**: [http://www.osfa.la.gov/](http://www.osfa.la.gov/)

**School Aid**: contact financial aid office at universities

**Scholarships**: numerous scholarship opportunities are available and many provide need-based financial aid

Source: Education: [https://studentaid.ed.gov/](https://studentaid.ed.gov/)
Financial Need Formula

- **Cost of Attendance (COA)**
  - COA is tuition, fees, room and board, transportation, etc.

- **Expected Family Contribution (EFC)**
  - EFC comes from what you report on FAFSA
  - The EFC is a measure of how much the student and his or her family can be expected to contribute to the cost of the student’s education. The EFC is calculated according to a formula specified in the law.

\[ \text{COA} - \text{EFC} = \text{financial need} \]
FAFSA Tips for Foster Youth

- Work Study? – answer “yes” to potentially receive part-time employment opportunities

- “Are you a foster youth or were you at any time in the foster care system?” – answer “yes”

- Highest school completed by parent?
- Does NOT refer to legal guardian or foster parent
Do not select “With Parent” as the Housing plan, instead select “Off-campus.” Even if the foster youth plans to live with foster parent or legal guardian.
“At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care, or were you a dependent or ward of the court?”

“Does someone other than your parent or stepparent have legal guardianship of you, as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?”

Answering “yes” to these questions will qualify a student as “Independent” and they do not have to provide any parent information.
FAFSA: Verifying Independent Status

- Colleges might ask for documentation that verifies student’s “Independent Status”

- Students must submit the required documents to their institution in order to receive financial aid.
  - Court Dependency Letter

- Students selected for verification are selected at random, and some schools verify all FAFSA forms.
Pell grants are for low-income students with a low EFC

The 2018-19 maximum Pell award is $6,095
Supporting Foster Youth
Foster Youth College Success Story

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJ7cuVeLUYg
Benefits of a College Education

- Higher earnings
- Pay more taxes
- Higher employment rate
- Healthier lifestyles
- Volunteerism
- Voting
- Less public assistance

Source: Education Pays 2016
“The overall patterns are clear and dramatic — more education means increased opportunities. Although it requires a considerable investment of dollars, time, and effort, higher education measurably improves the lives of most who participate. It pays off very well for most students, both financially and in terms of personal and intellectual development. Higher education improves people’s lives, makes our economy more efficient, and contributes to a more equitable society.” (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016, p. 8)
28 states (in orange) have enacted tuition assistance policies for foster youth alumni students.

**FIGURE 1: STATE-LEVEL TUITION ASSISTANCE**

Source: Education Commission of the States (2016)
LOSFA

- Office at the Louisiana Board of Regents
- The mission is to “promote and provide college access”
- LOSFA Programs include TOPS, GO Grants, START Saving Program, TOPS TECH Early Start, and Chafee Educational Training Voucher (ETV) Program
Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program

- Available to qualified students who have been in the foster care system
- Awards up to $5,000 annually so that students can pursue a college education or technical training
- To apply students should submit their FAFSA and consult with the college admission office

Source: LOSFA
TOPS Opportunity Award

- Merit-based scholarship program for Louisiana residents that covers tuition
- Minimum High School GPA of 2.50 and Minimum ACT Score of 20
- Must enroll full time as a first time freshman, by the first semester following the first anniversary of high school graduation
- To qualify students should submit their FAFSA and apply to college

Source: LOSFA
Louisiana GO Grant

- Available to qualified low-income students who receive the Pell Grant
- Awards up to $3,000 annually
- To apply students should submit their FAFSA and consult with the college admission office
- Awarded to students at community colleges as well as 4-year universities

Source: LOSFA
Many students aspire to go to college, but do not enroll because they lack information and fail to complete some part of the complex college application process (Avery & Kane, 2004; Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005; Klasik, 2012).

Students often over-weigh immediate costs and forego investments what would be in their long-term interest (Castleman et al., 2015).

Assisting students with applications increases college enrollment (Bettinger et al., 2012).
Individual Institutions

- Programs for Foster Care Alumni Students
- Programs for first-generation, low-income college students
  - TRIO Student Support Services
  - Food Pantries
  - Need-based scholarships
References

- PBS News Hour. 2016, March 29. Former foster youth defies odds, determined to change the system [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJ7cuVeLUYg
Questions?

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