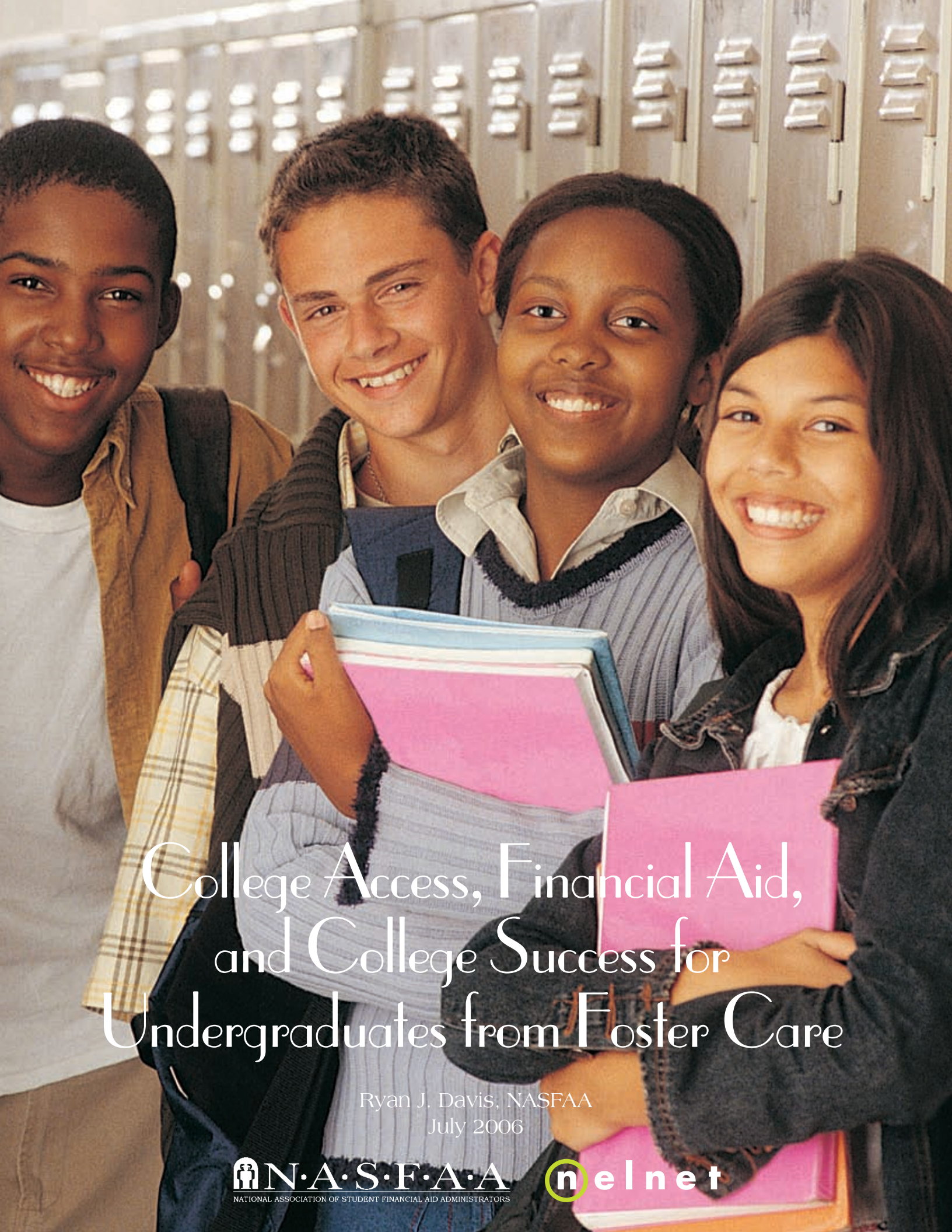

College Access, Financial Aid, and College Success for Undergraduates from Foster Care

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FOREWORD

Our nation's foster care system serves more than 800,000 children and adolescents each year. Many of these children are neglected, abused, and face a number of other challenges and hardships. State and local child welfare agencies, courts, private service providers, and public agencies that administer government programs often do everything they can to support these young people. However, because of these children's many needs, their postsecondary education aspirations and preparation oftentimes are neglected.

Much of the research conducted on youth from foster care has primarily examined their health status and the effects of placement in foster care on adult maturation. A few recent studies — most notably the Institute for Higher Education Policy's excellent report, *Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth* — have explored postsecondary enrollments of youth formerly in foster care. However, to our knowledge, no nationally representative data have been recently analyzed or synthesized on foster students' progress through the higher education system. Very little is known about the postsecondary experiences of undergraduates who enter college from foster care because too often comparable data are not collected. The absence of sound data and information about youth in foster care prevents advocates, analysts, and policymakers from meeting the full educational needs for one of this country's most vulnerable populations.

This report intends to fill this knowledge gap by providing some background information on the characteristics of undergraduates from foster care, the rate at which they access colleges, their financial aid packages, and (most importantly) their rates of degree attainment. Ryan J. Davis, the report's author, has documented the need for policymakers to do more to ensure that students from foster care both access college and succeed in school once they enter.

This report is the third in a series of studies on critical issues involving access to higher education for underrepresented groups and ways these barriers can be overcome. The series is being supported by a grant from the National Education Loan Network (Nelnet). The topics covered in this NASFAA/Nelnet

College Access Series have been decided by the NASFAA staff, in consultation with the Association's Research Committee.

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In any given year, there are approximately 800,000 youth in the foster care system. These are young children and adolescents whose parents are deceased or who have been subjected to some form of neglect or abuse. They are considered "wards/dependents of the court" and placed in the foster care system, making them the legal custody of the state.

About 300,000 of these youth are between the ages of 18 and 24, the traditional college-going years. What are the postsecondary education experiences of youth from foster care? Are they able to receive adequate amounts of financial aid and other services they need to succeed in higher education? This report examines the effects of placement in foster care on college access, financial aid, and college success for undergraduate students.

Most traditional-age college attendees are able to receive guidance and support from their parents or legal guardians. Foster children do not have these advantages. Research on youth in foster care indicates that many of them face several problems that delay their ability to live independently once they become young adults — such as purchasing groceries and maintaining a bank account. Furthermore, many children in foster care experience physical and mental health issues, several changes in elementary and secondary schools, homelessness, substance abuse, poverty, and a number of other troubling issues that impedes their ability to gain access to higher education. As a result, studies reveal that only 10 percent of all traditionally college-aged youth from foster care enroll in some form of postsecondary education, even though nearly 70 percent have aspirations to do so. Prior research has estimated that approximately 100,000 college-aged foster care alumni are missing out on higher education opportunities.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics' 2004 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), only 0.4 percent of the 19.2 million undergraduates attending postsecondary educational institutions in academic year 2003–2004 were from foster care (these students identified themselves as a "ward/dependent of the court" on the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FASFA). Undergraduates

from foster care were generally less racially and ethnically diverse than the total number of children and youth in the foster care system, but were more diverse than the non–foster-care student population. Undergraduates from foster care also held annual incomes that were substantially lower than all other financially independent undergraduates. For example, among undergraduates who attended private institutions, the average 2002 income for students from foster care was only about $5,000, compared with an average of nearly $39,000 for all other independent undergraduates and almost $63,000 for traditional-age undergraduates who were financially dependent.

Youth from foster care who attended college were just as likely to attend four-year public and private colleges and universities as other students. Their average cost of attending college also was nearly identical to their non-foster-care peers.

Despite their lower income levels, undergraduates from foster care generally were just as likely to attend four-year public and private colleges and universities as other students. Their average cost of attending college also was nearly identical to their non–foster-care peers. Due in part to their lower income status, a higher share of undergraduates from foster care received financial aid, and they generally were awarded higher financial aid amounts than other students. As a result, they were able to attend similar institutional types as all other students, which suggest their institutional choice and selectivity were very similar to non–foster-care undergraduates. A higher share of youth formerly in foster care also were enrolled full-time at their postsecondary education institutions. In short, undergraduates from foster care appear to have been awarded enough financial assistance to attend institutions similar to those attended by other students, and once they enroll in higher education they are as likely to attend their institutions on a full-time basis as all other undergraduates.

Although foster care alumni may be entering postsecondary education with the necessary financial resources to succeed, they may lack the structured support systems and other services that would enable them to achieve their degrees. Only 26 percent of foster care alumni who entered higher education in 1995 completed their degrees within six-years, versus 56 percent of all other undergraduates, according to the 2001 Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) Longitudinal Survey. Even more troubling is the fact that the primary reasons for not completing degree programs was unknown for more

than three-fourths of all non-completing undergraduates from foster care; therefore, the factors that contributed to their degree incompletion are unknown. Thus, assessing what undergraduates from foster care need in order to be successful in college is limited primarily to general research that identifies their problems prior to college enrollment.

This finding notwithstanding, it is clear that youth in foster care have not received the necessary support to pursue higher education opportunities or to complete degree programs at the same rates as their peers. More specifically, while access to college is dismal among youth formerly in foster care, the degree attainment rates among those who are able to begin college are even more disheartening. Given this result, the federal and state governments and institutions of higher education should consider making changes to the way they are attempting to identify, recruit, track, and retain students from foster care.

This report provides a comprehensive list of recommendations for government and institutional leaders to improve the rates at which foster care alumni access and succeed in higher education. These suggestions include:

- For federal and state governments and not-for-profit organizations:
  - extend Medicaid coverage until the age of 24 in each state;
  - ensure foster care staffing needs are met to increase recruitment and retention of employees;
  - establish high expectations for elementary and secondary educational success;
  - establish a postsecondary preparatory curriculum for youth in foster care that focuses on preparing youth for college, helping them adjust to the campus environment, and completing their degree programs;
  - require federally funded outreach services to target youth in foster care to increase their predisposition towards college;
  - improve the design of the FASFA so youth in kinship care and those who have experienced foster care will

While access to college is dismal among youth formerly in foster care, the degree attainment rates among those who are able to begin college are even more disheartening.

be able to identify themselves more easily as a "ward/dependent of the court;"
- provide outreach services that include youth in foster care specifically among not-for-profit organizations that currently serve low-income and first generation students to increase college access and success for foster care alumni;
- mandate a plan to help abandon the deficit-oriented perception of the child welfare systems and youth in foster care; and,
- require state child welfare systems to report high school completion and higher education enrollment rates to federal authorities.

Establish a holistic "scholars" program that aims to recruit and retain undergraduates from foster care by providing academic and social support services that are unique to their needs

- For postsecondary institutions:
  - encourage admissions offices to consider using non-cognitive variables (such as the students' life experiences and other non-quantitative factors that might demonstrate the students' ability to succeed in college) to assess undergraduate admissions applications;
  - extend a special invitation to foster care alumni to participate in summer bridge programs (which support the college adjustment process for first generation students, low-income students, and students of color) to help them transition to the campus environment;
  - ensure financial aid administrators use student financial aid information to identify incoming students from foster care;
  - require institutional researchers to track college access and success rates of students formerly in foster care;
  - establish a holistic "scholars" program that aims to recruit and retain undergraduates from foster care by providing academic and social support services that are unique to their needs;
  - provide complimentary health services to treat the number of mental and physical health issues before foster care alumni begin their first academic semester;

- encourage financial aid offices to promote work study opportunities to undergraduates from foster care; and,
- ensure housing departments inquire about the housing needs of foster care alumni over breaks when school is not in session and make accommodations available if necessary.

Youth formerly in foster care are among the most disadvantaged students in higher education. The issues they face usually begin when they are very young and linger into adulthood. State and federal policymakers and college and university administrators must develop national interventions to help foster care alumni acquire the same higher education opportunities as their non–foster-care counterparts. The recommendations offered in this report are a first step toward reversing the negative trends and barriers foster care alumni face when they attempt to access and succeed in higher education.

Youth formerly in foster care are among the most disadvantaged students in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Children in foster care — adolescents whose parents are deceased or who have been subjected to some form of neglect or abuse and subsequently placed in out-of-home care — have been one of the most disadvantaged groups in U.S. higher education and society. They face a number of educational, health, and other challenges that limit their ability to access postsecondary education. Furthermore, there is no national concentrated effort to help them achieve college access and success (Wolanin, 2005). Given their plight from childhood to adulthood, it is not surprising that very few youth placed in foster care acquire the necessary resources to enter college. For the small number of foster care alumni who are afforded the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education, many do not achieve what they originally aspire to—that is, to obtain an educational degree or certificate. Most colleges and universities have not yet recognized how the pre-college experiences among youth formerly in foster care hinder their ability to be successful in college.

This report first describes the nature of the foster care system and how the overall experience of youth in foster care harms their ability to access higher education. Next, the report uses two data sources from the National Center for Education Statistics to compare the demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, financial aid packages, college enrollment status, and persistence and degree attainment rates among undergraduate students who are from foster care with those who are not.[1] Finally, the report concludes by providing recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to make higher education accessible to more youth in foster care and to improve the rate at which this group persists and subsequently completes their degree programs.

[1] The two data sources used in this report are the 2004 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study and the 2001 Beginning Postsecondary Study Longitudinal Survey.

THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM AND KINSHIP CARE

America's foster care system is designed to create a safe and healthy living environment for children who have experienced some form of maltreatment. The system aims to care for orphans and neglected and abused youth who can no longer live with their parents. Youth may enter state foster care systems upon birth or anytime throughout their childhood. When they do enter this system, they become a legal responsibility of the state and are cared for by public authorities until they are reunited with family members, adopted, or reach adulthood. In each state, there are distinct differences in the organizational structure, administration, financial contributions, and policies by which the foster care system is governed (Bass, et al., 2004). As a result, the ways in which youth access and receive service in this system vary from state to state. Foster care systems in each state are also very complex and involve collaborations among the courts, private service providers, and public assistance agencies (such as welfare, mental health counseling, and substance abuse treatment organizations) to meet the needs of foster children.

The foster care system faces multiple challenges. Unmanageable caseloads, poor working conditions, and a negative public perception contribute to employee turnover in the foster care system (Chipungu and Bent-Goodley, 2004). Prior research has found that 90 percent of foster care agencies often have difficulty recruiting and retaining their workers (Chinungu and Bent-Goodley, 2004). Unfortunately, this problem impairs the ways in which children are served in the foster care system in each state.

Despite the different ways in which children might access and experience foster care, the need for a strong foster care system is growing each year. Between 1980 and 2001, the foster care population in the U.S. almost doubled, rising from approximately 302,000 to 542,000 (Casey Family Programs, 2006b). More recently, more than 800,000 children were served by foster care agencies in 2004, and about 300,000 of those youth were between the ages of 18 and 25, the traditional college-going years (Bass, et al., 2004; U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services, 2005b; Wolanin, 2005). The growing numbers of parental incarcerations, child substance abuse exposures, and youth who require out-of-home placements have contributed to the rapid rise of the foster care population (Chipungu and Bent-Goodley, 2004).

An alternative path to caring for orphans and maltreated youth is through kinship care, in which children and adolescents are placed with family members other than parents. Although kinship care is one of the oldest human traditions, it was not formally recognized as a legitimate placement option for children in foster care until the passage of federal welfare reform in 1996 and the Adoption and Safe Families Act in 1997. Since then, the number of children formally cared for in this way has increased, and more services and dollars have been directed toward this group of caregivers. Data suggest that kin caregivers are also the fastest-growing group of foster care providers, increasing from approximately 18 percent in 1986 to 31 percent in 1990 (Bass, et al., 2004; Kusserow, 1992). Today, approximately 500,000 children who have had some involvement with the foster care system are currently living in kinship care arrangements (Urban Institute, 2003). Research suggests that over 60 percent of all youth in foster care are cared for by kinship providers (Bass, et al., 2004; Wolanin, 2005). Many youth in kinship care do not receive adequate support from foster care agencies because it is remote from the state system. This could adversely affect the rate at which these youth access college preparatory programs and acquire prerequisite knowledge to navigate the college application and financial aid processes.

National data indicate that 58 percent of all youth served by the foster care system are non-White, compared with only 33 percent of the U.S. population.

Demographic Characteristics of Children in Foster Care

The majority of youth served in foster care are children of color as a result of longstanding racial inequities in the U.S. (Bass, et al., 2004). National data indicate that 58 percent of all youth served by the foster care system are non-White, compared with only 33 percent of the U.S. population (Bass, et al., 2004; Chinungu and Bent-Goodley, 2004; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). More specifically, when

compared to the general U.S. population, children of color served by the foster care system are disproportionately African American and Native American, while Latinos and Asian or Pacific Islander children are slightly underrepresented (Bass, et al., 2004). Foster children also tend to be male — about 53 percent of children in foster care are boys and young men, versus 51 percent of children 18 years old and under in the general U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2001; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005b). These children also generally come from lower-income families than their non-foster peers. This fragile economic situation continues for many youth even after leaving foster care. For example, Pecora and his colleagues (2005) found that almost one-third of young adults formerly served by the foster care system had household incomes at or below the poverty level, three times the national average.

Many youth from foster care experience several elementary and secondary school placements, behavioral problems, unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, emotional disorders, and HIV/AIDS throughout their childhood.

The Plight of Children in Foster Care

Despite the good intentions of foster care agencies and other service providers, many children placed into the system experience additional mistreatment (Bass, et al., 2004; Harden, 2004). As a child enters this system without parental or family support, problems with educational achievement, mental and physical health, substance abuse, and poverty tend to emerge (Shin, 2003; Wald and Martinez, 2003). More specifically, many youth from foster care experience several elementary and secondary school placements, behavioral problems, unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, emotional disorders, compromised brain development, high levels of depression, social phobia, panic disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and HIV/AIDS throughout their childhood (Altshuler, 1997, 1999; Ayasse, 1995; Barth, 1990; Casey Family Programs, 2003; Chipungu and Bent-Goodley, 2004; Cook, 1991, Harden, 2004; Iglehart, 1994; Jackson, 1994; Massinga and Pecora, 2004; McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, and Piliavin, 1996; McMillen and Tucker, 1999; Pecora et al., *The...*, 2005; Piliavin and Sosin, 1987; Tompson and Fuhr, 1992). Pecora and his colleagues (*The...*, 2005) reviewed case records of 659 youth in foster care and interviewed 479 young adults from

foster care over a 10-year period. They found that youth in foster care were twice as likely as youth not in foster care to have mental health problems and twice as likely as all other independent adults to be without any type of health insurance. Further, they found that over 20 percent of youth formerly in foster care have been homeless for at least one day within one year of exiting the foster care system. Other studies have found that 43 percent of youth in foster care do not reunite with their birth parents, and this is exacerbated when children remain in foster care until they reach 18 years of age, the legal age of adulthood and also the traditional age of first-year college attendance (Chipungu and Bent-Goodley, 2004; Wald and Martinez, 2003).

BARRIERS TO COLLEGE ACCESS

All of the aforementioned personal and economic issues that youth in foster care encounter throughout their childhood hinder their ability to prepare adequately for higher education. Unfortunately, many foster care alumni need to worry about basic living necessities such as food, shelter, money, and health; realities that limit any opportunity for them to pursue higher education enrollment. They also lack parental support, practical knowledge about college preparatory curricula, and skills to navigate the college enrollment process (Blome, 1997; Shin, 2003; Wolanin, 2005). Therefore, they are rarely predisposed or informed about the key factors that influence college enrollment behavior. In an article, Newberger (2001) quoted one youth formerly in foster care who reflected on his higher education pursuit. This foster care alumnus underscored the lack of preparatory information he and his peers received:

> *College is not something people talk to foster children about … they don't grow up with that cultural expectation … they are not even expected to succeed academically … but once we start expecting them to succeed, they will. (p. 1)*

Given the lack of discourse about postsecondary education options between foster children and their caregivers, it should not be surprising to find that youth may consider colleges to be mysterious places and have difficulty envisioning themselves in such institutions (McMillen and Tucker, 1999). Furthermore, the high turnover rates of overworked and underpaid professionals who work with youth in foster care reduce any chances for children to receive consistent college-going messages (Bass, et al, 2004; Wolanin, 2005). This trend also diminishes the opportunities for youth in foster care to acquire structural mentoring and role models over an extended period of time, which has a direct effect on their chances to receive college-going messages from admirable and trustworthy adults.

Thus, many youth in foster care perceive the cost of college as unaffordable, and they often are unaware of the different

forms of financial aid such as Federal Pell Grants[2] that are available to them (Wolanin, 2005; Workforce Strategy Center, 2000). Approximately 1.5 million undergraduates missed out on financial aid opportunities by not completing the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FAFSA), and most of these non-applicants were from low-income backgrounds (King, 2006). Given the lack of coordination in the foster care system and weak college-going messages youth in foster care receive, it is very likely that some of the individuals who missed these opportunities were from foster care.

Perhaps the most prominent barrier to college for youth in foster care is the frequent disruptions in their educational experiences due to changes in school placements (Wolanin, 2005). Pecora et al. (*Improving…*, 2005) found that 65 percent of adults formerly in foster care experienced seven or more elementary and secondary school changes before leaving high school. This disruption often forces youth in foster care to adjust to mulitple school environments at the same time they are trying to get used to a new home. Consequently, they tend to miss critical parts of their educational experiences and do not get the opportunity to become well prepared for college (Emerson, 2006). Even among those who do complete high school, many do so by earning a general education development credential, which immediately places them at a disadvantage in gaining access to higher education (Pecora et al., *How…*, 2005; Smith, 2003). Wolanin (2005) estimates, "If foster youth completed high school and attended postsecondary education at the same rate as their peers, nearly 100,000 additional foster youth in the 18- to 25-year-old age group would be attending higher education" (p. xiv).

Given the lack of discourse about post-secondary education options between foster children and their care-givers, it should not be surprising to find that youth may consider colleges to be mysterious places and have difficulty envsioning themselves in such institutions.

[2] The Federal Pell Grant program is the largest grant program for low-income post-secondary students. This program provides nearly $13 billion in aid to students. The awards may be used to pay tuition, fees, room, board, books, supplies, and other educationally related expenses. In academic year 2005–2006, grants ranged from $400 to $4,050.

Federal and Institutionally Based Interventions

Although several barriers impede access to higher education for youth in foster care, a national effort to reduce these factors has not yet evolved (Wolanin, 2005). Only a few programs attempt to increase the college-going rates of at-risk youth in foster care. One of these programs, part of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, aims to help young children transition out of foster care. Title I of this Act authorizes the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (now referred to as the Chafee Independence Program). This program is designed to help foster care alumni between the ages of 18 and 21 develop interpersonal skills and financial management skills, obtain high school diplomas, establish healthy living practices, acquire vocational training or postsecondary education preparation, and utilize career exploration and job placement services along with other appropriate support services.

One foster care alumnus asserted that in order to get foster care alumni through college "we have to walk them through the minefield."

Another federal intervention effort, the Chafee Education and Training Vouchers Program, supports postsecondary educational endeavors of foster care alumni by allocating $45 million annually to states. It provides 18– to 21-year-old students from state foster care systems with up to $5,000 to pay for higher education expenses. If the students make satisfactory progress toward a college degree or certificate, these vouchers may extend until they are 23 years old.

While these programs have begun to acknowledge the plight of youth who emancipate from foster care and to provide some additional federal financial assistance, they have not provided these young persons with the skills they need to complete the college admission and financial aid process (Wolanin, 2005). In a recent issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Walters (2005, p. A21) quoted one foster care alumnus who asserted that in order to get foster care alumni through college "we have to walk them through the minefield." These federally funded programs also do not have a comprehensive support structure to help foster care alumni transition into the college campus environment.

Some relatively new statewide and institutionally based interventions are designed to help foster care alumni enroll in college and receive needed financial aid, guidance, and support

services (Walters, 2005; Emerson, 2006). These initiatives have increased in the states of California, Indiana, and Washington, and some (e.g., the Guardian Scholars Program at California State University, Fullerton, and the Governor's Scholarship Program in Washington) have reported retention and graduation rates for foster care alumni that have exceeded those of the general student body (Emerson, 2006). The institutionally based programs typically waive tuition at public colleges and universities and offer interventions such as summer transitional programs and academic assistance exclusively for foster care alumni. However, most of the programs that are designed to provide tuition waivers for foster care alumni only involve state institutions and a few community colleges, making these services available to foster care alumni who only enroll at these particular institutions (Walters, 2005).

COLLEGE ACCESS AND FINANCIAL AID

Due in large measure to the many hardships described earlier, it is clear that very few young adults from foster care are able to attend college. According to Wolanin (2005), of the 300,000 young adults in foster care between the ages of 18 and 25, only about half graduate from high school and just 10 percent attend postsecondary education. This low rate of college attendance is especially unfortunate given that other studies have found that 70 percent of all youth in foster care have aspirations to participate in higher education (McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, and Thompson, 2003; Wolanin, 2005). Traditional college-age students who never experienced foster care are approximately *six times* more likely to enroll in some form of higher education than those who have been in foster care (Wolanin, 2005).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that just 0.4 percent of the 19.2 million undergraduates enrolled in academic year 2003–2004 were from foster care (NCES, 2005a). Data on the demographic characteristics and financial aid status of undergraduates who entered higher education in 2003-2004 after spending time in the foster care system were derived from the 2004 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS). NPSAS is conducted about every three years by NCES. The most recent NPSAS survey is based on data gathered on 80,000 undergraduates who attended postsecondary institutions throughout the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico at any time between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004. The survey sample was weighted so that the respondents represent the roughly 19.2 million undergraduates who were enrolled in college during the study period (NCES, 2005a). These data include information on the roughly 78,000 students who identified themselves as being a "ward/dependent of the court" (a proxy for persons who spent at least some of their childhood in foster care until the age of 18). These NPSAS data are based on students' responses to the "wards/dependents of the court" question asked on the Free Application for Student Financial Assistance (FAFSA) — the application all students who wish to receive federal student financial assistance must complete. Therefore, the

study results are limited only to those students who completed the FASFA *and* identified themselves as a ward/dependent of the court. The study results do not include those foster care alumni who attended college but did not apply for financial aid. These restrictions may have resulted into an undercount of undergraduates from foster care.

Demographic Characteristics of Foster Care Alumni in College

The NCES data (2005a) show that the small percentage of undergraduates from foster care who were in college had very different characteristics than other students. While the majority of youth in foster care from the general population were persons of color, the majority (51 percent) of foster care alumni enrolled in higher education were White, non-Hispanic (see Table 1). However, when compared with the total enrollment of students on postsecondary campuses, a higher proportion of students from foster care were black or Hispanic. These enrollment data

Of the young adults in foster care between the ages of 18 and 25, only about half graduate from high school and just 10 percent attend post-secondary education.

Table 1
Demographics Characteristics of Foster Youth Undergraduates and Non-foster Youth Undergraduates

	Foster Youth	Non-foster Youth
Gender		
Male	54%	58%
Female	46%	42%
Race/Ethnicity		
White, Non-Hispanic	51%	63%
Black, Non-Hispanic	25%	14%
Hispanic/Latino	18%	13%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%	5%
Other	4%	5%
Age Levels*		
Less than 19	38%	22%
19 to 24	62%	39%
25 and Older	+	39%

+ Less than 1%
*Students' ages as of December 31, 2003

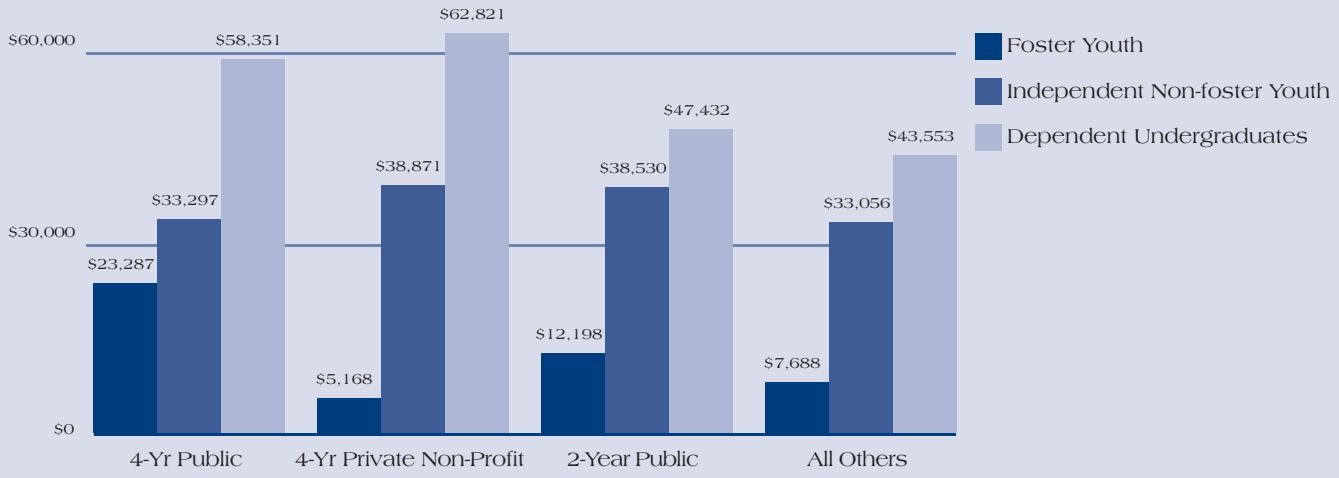
Source: National Center for Educational Statistics,2005a.

suggest that schools that enroll more youth formerly in foster care are able to increase their racial and ethnic diversity. There were no substantial differences in the gender composition of foster care alumni and non–foster-care students. However, foster care alumni who enter higher education appear to be substantially younger than other students. Roughly 38% of the undergraduates who said they spent time in the foster care system were 19-years-old or younger, compared with 22% of the non-foster-care students. Less than 1% of foster care alumni students were 25-years-old or older, versus 39% of all other students.

As noted previously, foster care alumni generally come from low-income backgrounds. Figure 1 on the next page illustrates the differences in average income between college students from foster care and non-foster care situations. Under federal financial aid law, all "wards/dependents of the court" are considered to be financially independent, regardless of their age. That is, the income from the students' parents or guardians will not be used to determine the students' financial aid eligibility. Because of this definition, the data in Figure 1 compare the income levels of all foster care alumni with all other financially independent undergraduates. For the sake of illustration, the figure also compares the income of independent undergraduates with those who are financially dependent (traditional-age students whose parents' income and assets are considered for financial aid eligibility). Within each institutional type, very large differences in family income averages exist. This gap is most pronounced at four-year private, nonprofit colleges and universities, at which the average income for foster care alumni attendees was just $5,188, compared with an average of $38,871 for all other independent students at these colleges, and $62,821 for dependent undergraduates at these institutions. As these data demonstrate, foster care alumni at all institution types must depend on far fewer family resources to help pay postsecondary expenses.

Under federal financial aid law, all "wards/dependents of the court" are considered to be financially independent, regardless of their age. That is, the income from the students' parents or guardians will not be used to determine the students' financial aid eligibility.

Figure 1
Average 2000 Income for Foster Youth Undergraduates, All Independent Undergraduates, and All Dependent Undergraduates, by Institution Type



Source: National Center for Educational Statistics,2005a.

Institutional Types and Attendance Status

Despite their lower income levels and other challenges, those foster care alumni who do attend college appear to be as likely to attend four-year institutions as their non-foster peers. For example, 29 percent of foster care alumni were enrolled at four-year public colleges and universities in 2003–2004, and these youth faced average educational prices of $12,757. This compares favorably with the 30 percent of non–foster-care alumni at four-year public institutions, who were charged average expenses of $12,295 (see Table 2 on the next page). These data suggest that if youth in foster care are able to overcome their barriers and gain college admission, they will enroll in colleges that are equal in quality and price to those institutions attended by their non-foster peers.

Furthermore, a higher share of foster care students than non–foster-care students were enrolled full-time (61 percent versus 54 percent). These full-time enrollment findings suggest that foster care alumni generally may have more access to campus resources. Full-time students are also generally more likely to complete their educational programs than students enrolled less than full-time.

Table 2

Distribution of 2003-2004 Undergraduate Foster Youth and Non-foster Youth Enrollment and Average Cost of Attendance, by Institution Type and Enrollment Status

	Foster Youth	Non-foster Youth
Institution Type		
4-Year Public	29%	30%
4-Year Private, Non-profit	11%	14%
2-Year Public	41%	40%
All Others	19%	16%
Cost of Attendance*		
4-Year Pubic	$12,757	$12,295
4-Year Private, Non-profit	$20,654	$22,177
2-Year Public	$ 6,470	$ 6,148
All Others	$13,034	$14,392
Enrolllment Status		
Full-time	61%	54%
Part-time	38%	45%

*Includes the cost of tuition, fees, room, board, books, educational supplies, and miscellaneous expenses charged for attending postsecondary institutions.

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics,2005a.

Students from foster care generally faced the same educational costs as their non-foster counterparts. Yet, they had dramatically lower incomes and were more likely to be financially independent.

Financial Aid

Students from foster care generally faced the same educational costs as their non–foster-care counterparts. Yet, they had dramatically lower incomes and were more likely to be financially independent. Thus, a higher percentage of them received financial aid, as Figure 2 on the next page illustrates. In 2003–2004, 91 percent of the foster care alumni at four-year public colleges received some form of financial aid, compared with 69 percent of non–foster-care undergraduates. At two-year public institutions (better known as community colleges) more than three-quarters of foster care undergraduates received aid, versus less than one-half of other students.

Overall, about 85 percent of undergraduate foster care alumni received some type of aid, compared with 63 percent of non-foster undergraduates (see Figure 3 on Page 22). Higher shares of undergraduate foster care alumni received federal grants and loans, while a higher proportion of their non-foster-

care peers received institutional aid and outside (privately funded) scholarships. A much higher share of foster care alumni than non–foster-care alumni received Federal Pell Grants (73 percent versus 27 percent) and state grants (28 percent versus 15 percent). Higher shares of undergraduates formerly in foster care also received Stafford Loans. On the other hand, a slightly higher share of non-foster students received institutional grants. The institutional aid results may be attributed to a growing number of colleges and universities that use tuition discounting practices. Institutions of higher education tend to use these strategies to distribute more of their aid to students based on their academic ability or other special talents, while proportionally fewer of these aid dollars are distributed based on students' financial need (Redd, 2000).

Figure 4 on the next page shows the average amounts of grants and loans undergraduates from foster care received compared with their non-foster peers. Generally, undergraduates from foster care received higher amounts of federal and state grants, while their counterparts received substantially higher institutional grants and Stafford Unsubsidized Loans. The Stafford Loan results may exist because these loans are

Figure 2
Percentage of Foster Youth and Non-Foster Youth Undergraduates Who Received Any Financial Aid in 2003-2004, by Institution Type

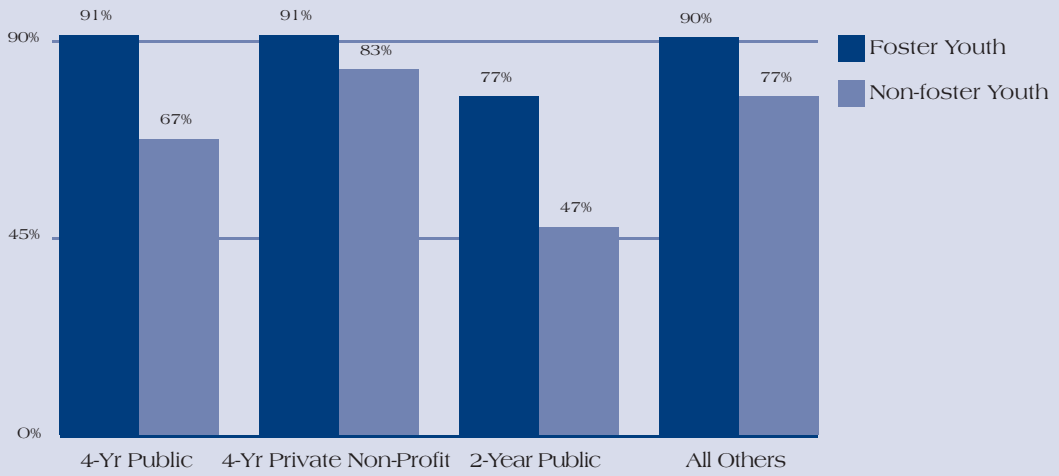
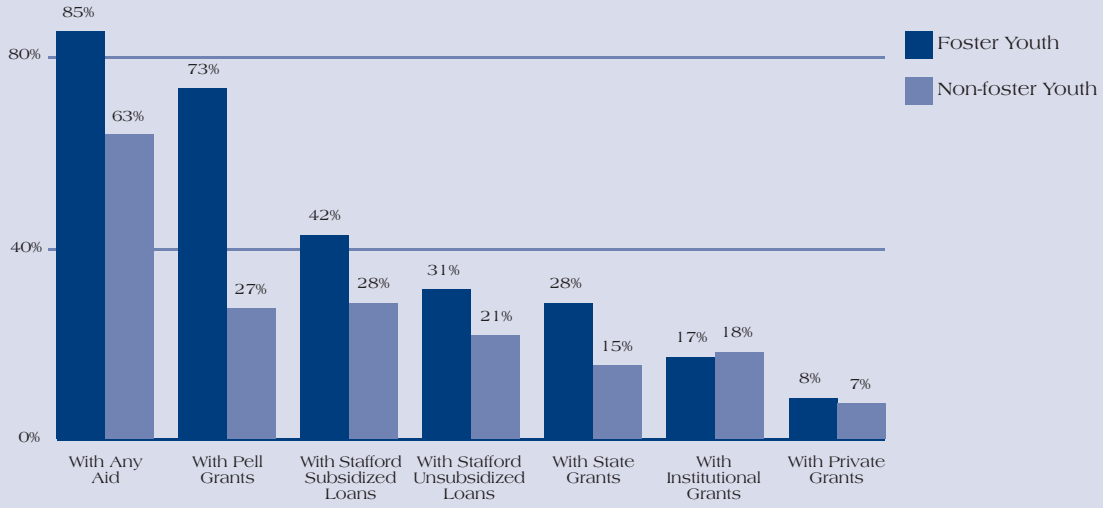


Figure 3

Percentage of Foster Youth and Non-Foster Youth Undergraduates Who Received Any Financial Aid by Aid Type

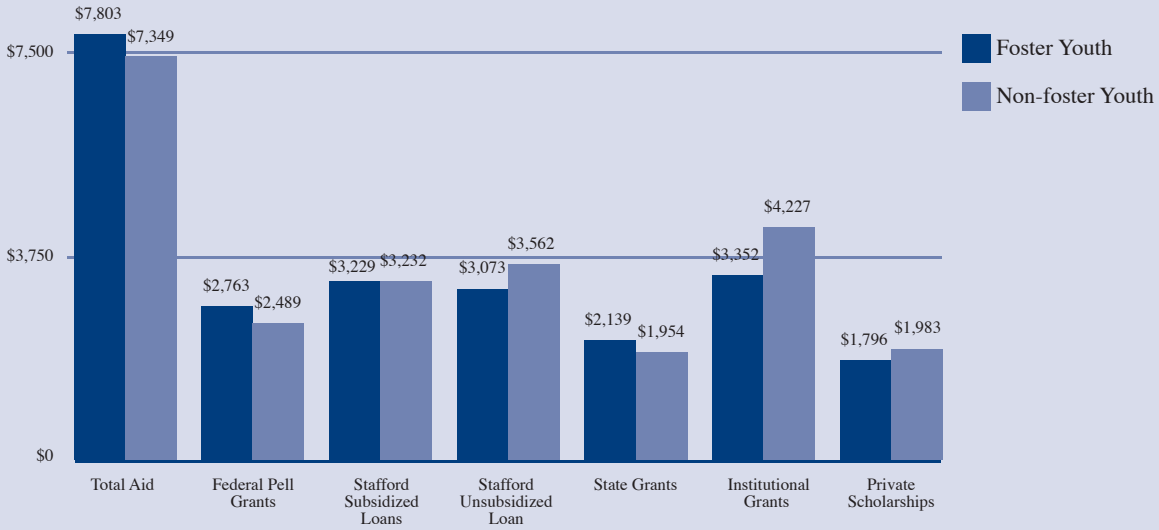


Source: National Center for Educational Statistics,2005a.

provided to students regardless of their income, and many higher-income dependent students may have received higher amounts of these loans. The institutional aid data may further demonstrate the use of merit-based grants at colleges and

Figure 4

Average 2003-2004 Financial Aid Awards for Foster Youth and Non-Foster Youth Undergraduates by Aid Program



Source: National Center for Educational Statistics,2005a.

universities, from which many foster care alumni may not have benefited.

Adjusting to Higher Education

While these data suggest that undergraduates from foster care are attending the same types of institutions as their peers, very little is known about their experiences once they begin their higher education programs. What is known is that students from foster care are overwhelmingly the first in their families to attend college, and are financially independent at much younger ages than most non–foster-care students, who usually are able to rely on family members or community networks for financial or emotional support (Emerson, 2006). To this end, the campus environment serves as the foster students' new home, and the campus community and outreach services that the institutions offer usually serve as their only support system.

The foster care system is structured to protect youth in foster care from abuse and neglect during their early schooling years, but it does not have strong systems for preparing these young people to adjust to a postsecondary education environment. Additionally, the great majority of college campuses do not have special programs in place to provide the appropriate services for students from foster care and their unique social, emotional, health, living, and academic needs (Emerson, 2006).

One premier need of young adults from foster care is housing. Casey Family Programs (2003) described the needs and experiences in college of one foster care alumnus who had no place to live during the holiday break:

> *When he left to attend San Jose State University, [Nguyen] became one of the small minorities of foster care alumni to attend a four-year college. His college years weren't easy for this intensely proud man. Because he had nowhere to go and was too proud to request assistance, he spent his first Christmas break from college sleeping in his Volkswagen. To stay in school Nguyen at times had to accept money from friends (p. 4).*

Students from foster care are overwhelmingly the first in their families to attend college, and are financially independent at much younger ages than most non-foster-care students, who usually are able to rely on family members or community networks for financial or emotional support.

When young adults exit the foster care system and attend college, the residence hall often serves as their only place to live. In this case, the university was likely unaware of Nguyen's housing needs. Consequently, his full needs were unmet. Some studies (e.g., Pecora et al., *How…*, 2005) have thus recommended keeping residence halls open year-long so that students from foster are provided with housing when school is not in session. Keeping the residence halls open would also keep the students connected with the campus community. Several universities in the states of California and Washington have begun to make residential facilities available for students from foster care during the summer and winter breaks. During a keynote speech at the 2006 Casey Family Program annual meeting, a recent graduate from Gonzaga University, a private four-year institution, asserted "My four years at Gonzaga was the most stable placement I ever had." Without a housing option over breaks when school was not in session, this alumnus' academic enrollment might have been jeopardized.

Another way of retaining undergraduates from foster care is to offer them more outlets for getting involved in the campus community.

Another way of retaining undergraduates from foster care is to offer them more outlets for getting involved in the campus community. Over 40 percent of adults from foster care volunteer in the community in a given year (Havalchak, 2006). In a national survey of older youth in the foster care system, 48 percent indicated they were involved in extracurricular activities at school (Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, 1998). Shin (2003) found that active participation in extracurricular activities had a strong association with healthy educational attainment among youth in foster care.

PERSISTENCE AND DEGREE ATTAINMENT

Similar to the paucity of research on college adjustment for undergraduates from foster care, very little is known about the rate at which young adults from foster care persist toward degree attainment. Only a few recent studies have provided any information on persistence and degree attainment rates for undergraduates from foster care. One study noted that only 2 percent of the foster care alumni completed a baccalaureate degree or higher (Pecora, et al., *Improving...*, 2005). College completion rates, however, are higher when follow-up studies include older adults. For example, the college completion rate was three times greater (at 10.8%) in a recent study of foster care alumni who were served by a voluntary child welfare agency and who were 25 years old and older (Pecora et al., 2003, p. 28). Casey Family Programs (2003) contended that "when supported with permanent homes, fewer placements, and additional comprehensive services, foster care youth graduate from high school and postsecondary education institutions at significantly higher rates" (p. 1).

Other research findings have suggested that between 5 percent and 10 percent of foster care alumni are earning a degree at postsecondary education institutions (Emerson, 2006; Wolanin, 2005). However, no nationally representative data have been recently analyzed and synthesized to identify the rate at which foster care alumni persist toward baccalaureate degree completion.

To measure degree attainment rates for foster care alumni and non–foster-care alumni, this study used data from the NCES 2001 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Survey (NCES, 2005b). The BPS, a sub-sample of the NPSAS data, follows a cohort of first-time undergraduates who entered postsecondary education in 1995. The students were followed for six years, and their level of persistence and degree attainment was tracked through the spring of 2001.

In spite of the fact that foster care alumni seem to enroll full-time at higher rates than all other undergraduates, the BPS data show that they were only about half as likely as their peers to complete higher education programs during the six-year study period (see Table 3 on the next page). That is, just 26 percent

Table 3
Six-year Persistence and Degree Attainment Levels for Foster Youth Undergraduates and Non-foster Youth Undergraduates Who First Entered Higher Education in 1995

	Foster Youth	Non-Foster Youth
Attained a Degree or Certificate	26%	56%
Left School With a Degree or Certificate	53%	31%
Still Enrolled (But Have Not Attained a Degree or Certificate)	22%	12%

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005b.

Foster care alumni were more likely than their counterparts to leave school without earning a degree or certificate, but a higher share of foster care alumni were still enrolled and pursuing a degree program after six years.

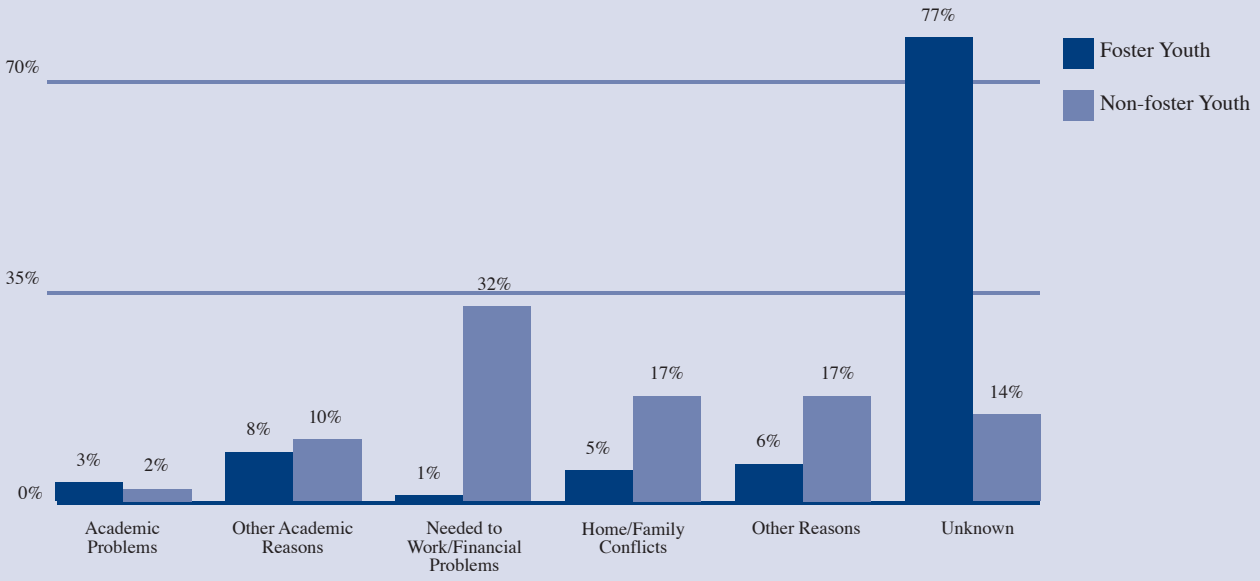
of foster care alumni who entered postsecondary education in 1995 had completed a degree or certificate program by 2001, compared with 56 percent of other students. Conversely, foster care alumni were more likely than their counterparts to leave school without earning a degree or certificate (53 percent versus 31 percent), but a higher share of foster care alumni were still enrolled and pursuing a degree program after six years (22 percent versus 12 percent).

The BPS survey also includes information on the primary reasons non-completing students left higher education before earning degrees or certificates. The information, based on student interviews, is displayed in Figure 5 on the next page. Among non–foster-care alumni, the most common reasons for non-completion were related directly or indirectly to financial concerns. A plurality, 32 percent, said they "needed to work" or faced "financial problems." This finding possibly reflects the high costs of attaining a college education. At the same time, just 2 percent of the respondents said they faced "academic problems." (Note that these are all self-reported responses.)

For foster care alumni, on the other hand, the primary reason for not finishing school was unknown. It is possible that these students could not be located for the follow-up surveys and their responses were not recorded. These individuals may have faced inadequate housing or other issues that forced them to leave school before they could be surveyed. It is also possible that the students' problems in school were too complex or multilayered for them to respond, or they were too embarrassed to give any reason for withdrawing.

Figure 5

Primary Reasons Cited by Foster Youth and Non-foster Youth for Leaving Postsedondary Education Programs Without a Degree or Certificate*



*Includes undergraduates who entered postsecondary institutions in Fall 1995 and left their institutions without completing a degree or certificate program on or before Fall 2001.

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005b.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Youth and adolescents who spend time in foster care are much less likely to enroll in postsecondary education institutions, and those who are able to attend are less likely than other types of undergraduates to persist and attain a bachelor's degree or certificate. These results occurred despite the fact that a higher share of undergraduates from foster care received financial aid and were enrolled full-time when compared with students who did not spend time in the foster care system. These findings suggest that colleges and universities must provide services beyond financial aid to undergraduates from foster care because it appears that their needs are not being met once they are admitted into college. Colleges, states, and federal programs must do more to ensure youth from foster care not only can enter higher education but also persist toward completing a postsecondary education program once they arrive on campus.

Support services should be initiated as soon as possible after undergraduate foster care alumni are identified, given that most young adults from foster care begin with income levels that are substantially lower than their non-foster-care peers'. The students formerly placed in foster care who are not completing their degree may be left at an even greater disadvantage than when they first enrolled in higher education due to the burden of incurring debt while in school with little to no financial stability if they leave without a degree or certificate. It is important to ensure that those who provide services to students from foster care fulfill the unique needs of this population so they can also benefit from everything that higher education has to offer.

Recommendations for State and Federal Policymakers and Not-for-Profit Organizations

To address the myriad of obstacles youth formerly in foster care face, a number of systematic policy and practical changes need to occur at the federal, state, and institutional levels. These changes could make higher education more accessible for youth in foster care and allow them to be successful once they enroll in postsecondary education. The recommended policy changes include:

Extend Medicaid Coverage Until the Age of 24 in Each State. Many youth from foster care have health issues that last far past the age at which they are eligible for care from the foster care system. These health issues may impede their ability to be successful in college. To ensure their needs can be met through college graduation, states should be required to extend Medicaid coverage for youth formerly in foster care until they reach 24 years of age (Wolanin, 2005). This is particularly important because most (62%) undergraduates from foster care are between the ages of 19 and 24.

Ensure Foster Care Staffing Needs Are Fully Met. Because many foster care systems report difficulty recruiting and retaining their employees as a result of poor compensation, unmanageable case loads, and negative public perceptions, agency personnel should work with state government leaders to hire more staff, increase financial and benefit packages, and work with consultants to learn how to reverse the negative public perceptions about working in the system. These changes will help to retain more employees and provide vulnerable youth in foster care with adults to serve as role models.

Establish High Expectations for Elementary and Secondary Education Success. The overall objective of the foster care system is to protect and provide healthy living for homeless, neglected, or abused youth. While this goal should remain a first priority, ensuring that youth in foster care receive the education and training they need to succeed should also be a major focus (Casey Family Programs, 2006a; Wolanin, 2005). For example, youth in foster care should be expected and encouraged to obtain a high school diploma over a GED. Given that changes in school placement may hinder this process, foster care staffing should work toward coordinating home placements that will decrease the number of elementary and secondary school transfers. Data from this study reveal that foster care alumni who are attending college enroll at four-year colleges at nearly the same rates as their non–foster-care counterparts. This finding suggests that youth in foster care hold the same academic aptitudes and educational aspirations as their peers.

To address the myriad of obstacles youth formerly in foster care face, a number of systematic policy and practical changes need to occur at the federal, state, and institutional levels.

States and the foster care system should do everything in their power to ensure that these students have the resources and educational experiences they need to meet their aspirations.

Establish a Postsecondary Preparatory Curriculum for Foster Care Youth. The foster care system works extremely hard to help youth in foster care prepare for independent living. While this should remain a first priority, there also should be a college preparatory curriculum that is unique to youth in foster care. Because many youth in foster care are not exposed to college-going messages and generally need remedial assistance, this curriculum should include both practical and academic components that address their problems and challenges. Foster care systems should use Casey Family Program's (2006) *It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training* guide as a framework to establish a meaningful curriculum for youth in foster care that includes long-term planning for postsecondary education, student support in taking standardized tests, assistance with the college application and financial aid processes, and helping students adjust to and complete their postsecondary education program. Foster parents, social workers, school counselors, college advisors, mentors, and all others who work to serve youth in foster care should be familiar with this resource.

Because many youth in foster care are not exposed to college-going messages and generally need remedial assistance, this curriculum should include both practical and academic components that address their problems and challenges.

Require Federally Funded Outreach Services to Target Youth in Foster Care. A national concentrated effort to provide direct outreach services to individuals in foster care is needed to help them enter and succeed in postsecondary education (Wolanin, 2005). A number of current federal programs and nonprofit organizations target underrepresented groups (such as first generation, low-income, and persons of color); these same programs should also target youth from foster care to help them obtain college-going messages and other information and services related to higher education access. Two federally funded programs that should include youth in foster care in their target populations are TRIO and Gaining Early Awareness

and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)[3]. The support services offered in these programs are designed to help disadvantaged students progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postsecondary education.

Improve the "Ward/Dependent of the Court" Designation on the FASFA. The language on the FASFA continuously changes from year-to-year. Previous research has demonstrated that the complexity of the federal financial aid form is a major barrier to college access for underrepresented groups (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2005). Since 2001, the question that asks foster care alumni to identify whether they have been in foster care until age 18 has changed four times. Despite these changes, numerous articles have maintained the language is still very confusing for children from foster care (e.g., Pecora et al., *How…*, 2005). The 2006-07 FASFA asked students, "Are (a) both of your parents deceased, or (b) are you (or were you until age 18) a ward/dependent of the court?" This language is problematic because it does not include youth who may have spent their entire childhood in foster care, but left before age 18. Furthermore, youth in kinship care seldom consider themselves as a "ward/dependent of the court." Consequently, these youths may be receiving less financial aid. To improve this question, the Higher Education Act and the financial aid form should change to incorporate youth who have experienced foster care at some point in their life. The FASFA should also be re-worded so that all youth from foster care, such as those in kinship care, are able to recognize easily whether their identity matches the question or not (Pecora et al., *How…*, 2005). This would help foster care alumni complete the application and qualify for scholarships and loans more easily.

The FASFA should also be worded so that all youth from foster care, such as those in kinship care, are able to recognize easily whether their identity matches the question or not.

[3] TRIO, a federally funded program that emerged from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, works to motivate and support low-income, first generation, and youth with disabilities in secondary education to ultimately increase higher education access for disadvantaged populations by offering eight different outreach programmatic interventions. GEAR UP is another federal program that was authorized under the Higher Education Act of 1965 and assembled in 1998. This program operates on a discretionary grant to enable states and partnerships to help low-income students gain access to and succeed in college.

Provide Outreach Services That Include Youth in Foster Care Specifically. Nonprofit organizations and private scholarship programs such as College Goal Sunday (a program that provides personal assistance for disadvantaged students and their families who need help completing FASFA) and the Gates Millennium Scholars program (a program that provides funding and support services for underrepresented students to access and succeed in college) should specifically reach out to youth placed in the state foster care systems, kinship care, and those participating in independent living programs. The intersection between these organizations and foster care agencies can be great sources for mutually beneficial collaborations and will help foster care alumni acquire more resources to achieve college access and success.

Those who work for and with the child welfare system should work to eliminate the views that give foster care and youth in foster care a negative public image.

Mandate a Plan to Help Abandon the Negative Public Perceptions of the Child Welfare Systems and Youth in Foster Care. Those who work for and with the child welfare system should work to eliminate the views that give foster care and youth in foster care a negative public image. Federal and state authorities should work collaboratively with the Foster Care Alumni Association of America, a not-for-profit organization comprised of several successful youth formerly in foster care, to develop and subsequently pass policies that change negative language associated with foster care and youth in foster care such as child "welfare" and "orphans." The goal and mission of foster care should promote more than just working to provide a safe community for abused and neglected youth and begin to use terminology that will help youth in foster care build high self-esteem and healthy self-images. This change in perception is vital for child welfare employees to acquire because they have the most contact with youth in foster care and the constituents who work to provide the necessary services for these youth. As the perception of youth in foster care begins to change, the trends that hinder these youth from being successful might fade.

Require State Child Welfare Systems to Report High School Completion and Higher Education Enrollment Rates. State child welfare systems should be required to report on the high

school graduation and higher education enrollment rates of their youth in foster care to federal authorities. Making data collection more cohesive will enable analysts to track the progress of youth in foster care and subsequently make necessary changes to improve the educational status of children in foster care.

Recommendations for Postsecondary Institutions

Once more foster care alumni are admitted to college, and as their younger peers become better prepared as a result of state and federal authorities' taking action to increase access, it will be up to the postsecondary institutions to ensure their success. As colleges and universities work to provide resources for students to be successful, undergraduates from foster care need not be overlooked. A series of systematic changes need to occur at institutions of higher learning to ensure the needs of undergraduates from foster care are being recognized and fulfilled before and after they are admitted. These changes are summarized below.

Once more foster care alumni are admitted to college, and as their younger peers become better prepared as a result of state and federal authorities' taking action to increase access, it will be up to the postsecondary institutions to ensure their success.

Admissions Offices Should Consider Using Non-cognitive Variables to Assess Undergraduate Applicants. Previously, this report illustrated the issues and barriers foster children face prior to gaining college access. To evaluate disadvantaged students more fairly, college and university admissions offices should use non-cognitive variables to assess undergraduate applicants (Sedlacek, 2004). That is, the institutions should rely less on the students' grades and admissions test scores and should consider the students' life experiences and other non-quantitative factors that might demonstrate the students' ability to succeed in college and contribute to a diverse campus community. Admissions offices could evaluate student applicants from foster care by considering how well they handle the educational system and participate in community service and other leadership activities (Sedlacek, 2004). Admission officers could also consider using variables that emphasize resiliency, goal setting, and support utilization, three factors the Governor's Scholarship Program in Washington uses to evaluate its applicants.

Admissions Offices Should Invite Foster Care Alumni to Participate in Summer Bridge Programs. Institutionally based summer bridge programs support the college adjustment process for first generation students, low-income students, and students of color. These programs usually occur during a six- to ten-week period preceding the students' first college year. Offering foster care alumni the opportunity to participate in these programs may be beneficial to their transition to the campus environment.

Financial Aid Administrators Should Use Student Financial Aid Information to Identify Incoming Students from Foster Care. Currently, the only way to identify students from foster care is by reviewing the self-reported responses on the FASFA. Financial aid administrators are the primary personnel on college or university campuses who review financial aid information and can identify undergraduates who were formerly in foster care (Emerson, 2006). Therefore, it is essential for financial aid personnel to notify the appropriate campus officials (e.g., institutional researchers, admissions officers, student affairs administrators) who might be able to ensure the needs of undergraduates from foster care are being met.

As soon as foster care alumni are admitted as undergraduates, they should be tracked by institutional researchers.

Institutional Researchers Should Track the College Access and Success of Foster Care Alumni. As soon as foster care alumni are admitted as undergraduates, they should be tracked by institutional researchers. By having this information, researchers can calculate and analyze the rates at which students from foster care are successful. Creating such a category for institutional assessment will enable campus leaders to identify how well (or poorly) they are serving undergraduate students from foster care.

Establish a Holistic "Scholars" Program That Provides Unique Academic and Social Support for Foster Youth. Attending a college or university may be awkward for many youth formerly in foster care. Thus, structured programs that offer guidance and advice should be in place to help them navigate the campus community and obtain the resources to be successful

(Emerson, 2006). These programs should provide foster care alumni with role models and mentors to help them adjust and persist toward degree completion. These mentors should be well aware of the general issues youth from foster care face and be ready and willing to respond to their needs. Campus officials working with youth formerly in foster care should obtain a copy of Casey Family Program's (2006) *It's My Life: Postsecondary Education and Training* guide to familiarize themselves with what undergraduates from foster care need to access and succeed in college. Those campus officials who serve as role models and mentors should specifically assist these youth with the following:

- purchasing books, setting up e-mail accounts, and participating in orientation programs;
- advising faculty members and other officials of any special academic accommodations that need to be made;
- connecting with the campus career center to encourage education and career planning;
- providing the resources and strategies needed for collaborative peer learning and studying opportunities to ensure foster care alumni are making good progress toward degree completion to maintain eligibility for the Chafee education and training voucher;
- identifying and making available academic remedial assistance and tutoring services, counseling services, and substance abuse services; and,
- ensuring opportunities for active out-of-class student engagement that are unique to the students' own interests, as many foster care alumni feel rewarded when they give back to the foster care system or local community.

Attending a college or university may be awkward for many youth formerly in foster care. Thus, structured programs that offer guidance and advice should be in place.

Institutions should identify a coordinator to be responsible for the successful integration of students from foster care. Adding this staff person could be an even more effective way to ensure these undergraduates are linked with committed and understanding campus and community role models and mentors. Institutions of higher education with a significant

number of undergraduates from foster care should consider replicating successful programs specifically designed for youth formerly in foster care — such as the Guardian Scholars Program at California State University, Fullerton.

Address as Many Physical and Health Issues as Possible Prior to the Start of Academic Programs. To ensure that youth remain healthy and no academic disruptions occur due to previous health concerns, institutions should help foster care alumni seek any needed medical attention, counseling, or disability services prior to the start of their academic programs. For many youth the goal will not be a "cure" for their mental health condition but healthy ways of coping with the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, generalized anxiety, and social phobia. Campus officials should not make assumptions that the students' prior or current health issues are resolved. They should find ways to inquire sensitively about these issues and should enable the students to share their problems if they so desire. Campus health centers should consider providing a reduced or complimentary health care package to youth formerly in foster care, depending on the level of past maltreatment these students have experienced and the severity of the mental health conditions they are enduring.

Providing opportunities to work on campus will help foster care alumni obtain additional funds to finance their way through college, while at the same time allowing the students to get connected with campus resourses and institutional personnel.

Provide Opportunities for Work Study. Work-study positions are excellent opportunities for foster care alumni to earn money and work in areas that encourage study and learning. Providing opportunities to work on campus will help foster care alumni obtain additional funding to finance their way through college while also allowing the students to get connected with campus resources and institutional personnel. These opportunities will help foster care alumni adjust to the college environment and persist toward degree completion.

Be Prepared To Keep Residence Halls Open During Winter and Summer Breaks. Many youth formerly in foster care reside in campus residence halls, which often are their only place to live. Housing departments should determine whether or not undergraduates from foster care need intersession housing prior

to closing the residential facilities. If youth formerly in foster care require housing, campus officials should keep dormitories open during all academic breaks.

It is clear that youth formerly in foster care are among the most disadvantaged and underrepresented students in higher education. The issues they face usually begin when they are very young and often linger into their adulthood. These issues undoubtedly affect their ability to access and succeed in higher education. Now is the time for state and federal policymakers and college and university administrators to develop national interventions to help more of these young men and women to acquire the same higher education opportunities as their non–foster-youth counterparts. Because the problems these youth face are multifaceted and complex, the recommendations offered in this report are offered as just a first step toward reversing these negative trends. These and other strategies and services could go a long way toward helping more foster care alumni access and succeed in higher education.

It is clear that youth formerly in foster care are among the most disadvantaged and underrepresented students in higher education.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Mr. Davis serves as a member on the advisory committee for the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity and on the editorial board for the *Journal of College and University Student Housing*; as a reviewer for the *Journal of College Student Retention*; and as a regular presenter at the American College Personnel Association, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, and the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity.

Mr. Davis holds a BS in business administration from Eastern Connecticut State University, where he was awarded the Dr. Martin Luther King Distinguished Service Award, and an MSEd in higher education administration from Old Dominion University, where he was awarded the Outstanding Graduate Student in Higher Education Award and the Emerging Professional Award.

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