FOSTER YOUTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative research study sought understanding about how former foster youth overcame the odds and completed their educational goals in higher education. More specifically, what personal characteristics and support services assist former foster youth into and through college?

Four years ago I was selected to attend the first Former Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) conference in California. The conference was held in an effort to connect 109 California Community Colleges to assist foster youth through the doors of college. What I was able to take away from the conference was that less than 3% of former foster youth graduate from college. After the conference, I was inundated with thoughts, questions, and concerns of my own as to why this population does not finish college.

I chose a sample of college graduates because I want to know how this atypical group of former foster youth overcame unbelievable odds to finish college.

This study utilized an electronic survey sent nationwide. The purpose of the survey is to ascertain the characteristics of former foster youth who have been successful in higher education and the supports that helped to promote that success in order to increase the understanding of barriers former foster youth face in higher
education and the kinds of support that assist them in successfully completing a degree.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

For most, the road to higher education and self sufficiency begins at a very young age. These children are nurtured by family members who support their success in life, especially in higher education. Access to education fosters dreams and paves the way to a college education. Unfortunately, many youth in the foster care system find the road to a higher education bleak and hopeless. Youth in foster care lack the needed family support and educational opportunities for higher education to be an easily attainable dream. More than 500,000 youth are in the foster care system at any given time in the United States (Casey Family Programs, Annual Report, 2008), and every year 4,000 youth emancipate from California’s foster care system upon reaching the age of 18 (Cooper, Mery, & Rassen, 2008). These youth typically do not have someone to advocate on their behalf, nor do they have the support that an intact family could provide.

When young people age out of the system, it means the state will no longer provide for them. They are let out into the world without money, a place to live, and someone to help guide them. As one former foster youth put it, “…then when we turn a certain age, we are released into a very hard world and expected to support ourselves” (Emerson, 2007, pg. 7). They may lack education due to having had
multiple home placements (i.e., group homes, foster homes, juvenile detention centers, etc.) while in their formative years. College is often the last thing youth are thinking about once they age out of the system. Rather, they tend to be in survival mode. While 7% to 13% of former foster youth enroll in higher education, only 3% attain a bachelor’s degree in comparison to the 27% of the general adult population who attain a bachelor’s degree (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008).

For the purposes of this study, former foster youth are defined as persons who are over the age of 18, and the state no longer has jurisdiction over them. Foster youth are those young people who are currently in the foster care system and under the age of 18. Aged out is defined as youth who turn 18 at which point the state relinquishes all control over them. The terms aging out, aged out, and emancipation are used interchangeably throughout this study.

About four years ago, I attended a foster youth conference for work in Southern California. I did not expect to leave the conference confused, emotionally and mentally drained, and overwhelmed with questions brimming in my brain. The question I kept revisiting was why do only 3% of former foster youth graduate from college, and what can colleges do to support this population to persist through college? Little research exists specifically regarding former foster youth and higher education. Therefore, I decided to dedicate my graduate research to the question: what support and personal characteristics assist former foster youth in entering and succeeding in college?
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The community college can be defined as “any institution accredited to award the Associate in Arts or the Associate of Science as the highest degree” (Cohen & Brawer, 1996, p. 5). It has been revolutionized since its first beginnings in 1901 (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Vaughan, 2000). Throughout the past 100 years, the community college has helped re-define higher education by reforming the standards, practices, and policies of who can attain an education and how it can be attained.

This chapter will explore the historical perspective of the community college and define the evolution of the community college past to present, including an in depth look at the community college population. This review will also examine the educational experiences of at risk students, particularly former foster youth and the barriers to higher education that former foster youth endure. The review will conclude with research questions specific to this study.

The Community College Movement

Although there is no exact date in which the community college began, there are a series of events that led to the implementation of the community college (Diener, 1986). First, the Morrill Act or Land Grant of 1862 and 1890 granted
30,000 acres of federal land to its congressional members to establish a university particularly focusing on agricultural and mechanical arts education (citation). The Morrill Act was implemented to serve a more diverse population than the typical university-bound students (Diener, 1986; Vaughan, 2000). Next, a Supreme Court decision known as the Kalamazoo Decision of 1874 laid the framework to increase educational opportunities for all students (Diener, 1986; Vaughan, 2006). The Michigan Supreme Court ruled that public funds could be used to create comprehensive high schools. This decision opened the flood gates for the initial foundation of the community college (Diener, 1986; Vaughan, 2000).

Five pivotal pioneers led the community college movement: William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago, William Folwell of the University of Illinois, Richard Jesse of the University of Missouri, Alexis Lang of the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford’s president David Starr Jordan. The group concluded that the general education and vocational programs should be left to the community college, and the higher level training and education be left up to the universities (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Diener, 1986; Roueche & Roueche, 1993; Vaughan, 1982).

These university leaders were striving for the establishment of upper-division and graduate education as the ideal of higher education, and they conceived of the two year college as a proper adjunct of secondary education. They
envisioned the shifting of the first two years of college study from the university campus to the high school, thus separating the freshmen and sophomore years from the rest of the university program. (Blocker, Plummer & Richardson, 1965, p. 24)

With Harper leading the way, the first community college was formed in 1901 (Vaughan, 1985; Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Joliet Township school board in Joliet, Illinois, authorized post high school graduate courses to be taught within the walls of Joliet High School (Vaughan, 1985; Cohen & Brawer, 1996). In other words, college level courses were mixed among high school courses and taught within the walls of Joliet High (Vaughan, 2006). By 1916 the enrollment within the junior college classes had grown so much that the high school created a college wing (Vaughan, 2006). This was the first facility created for public junior colleges, and in 1917 the college was officially named Joliet Junior College (Blocker, Plummer & Richardson, 1965; Diener, 1985; Medsker, 1960; Phillippe & Sullivan, 2006; Roueche & Roueche, 1996; Vaughan, 2006). The creation of Joliet Junior College was instrumental for the progress of the community college because it demonstrated a great need for a different form of higher education for the four following reasons: it demonstrated that a well equipped high school could offer college level work, it utilized tax dollars for post secondary education in the community, community members had input on the curriculum, and the transferability from a community college to a university seemed to be feasible and practical (Vaughan, 2006). As the
concept of the community college grew, so did the enrollment. The U.S. Department of Education realized that community college could no longer rely on the high schools to provide the support and control of the community college system, so the U.S Commissioner of Education called a two day meeting, and in 1920 the American Association of Junior Colleges was created (Diener, 1985; Vaughan, 2006). By 1921, California passed legislation stating that the community colleges would have their own governing boards, operating systems, and budgets (Vaughan, 1985).

Another facet to the implementation of the community college was the Servicemen Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Vaughan, 2000). The federal government was fearful that the United States would not have sufficient civilian jobs available to the men and women returning from World War II which could lead to another depression (Vaughan, 1982, 2000). The GI Bill provided monetary support for service men and women who wanted to attend college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2006; Vaughan, 1982, 2000). This bill also began to revolutionize who could attend college (Richardson, 1988). The federal government no longer wanted to perpetuate the stereotype that only the gifted and wealthy could attend college, wanting instead to see every person who had the desire to attend college be able to do so (AACC, n.d., Vaughan, 1985, 2006).

Another innovative movement was the release of the Commission Report on Higher Education in 1947, also known as the Truman Report (Diener, 1986;
Vaughan, 2006). Due to the diversification and the explanation of educational opportunities through the two year colleges, the Commission recommended that the number of two year colleges increase and that their activities multiply (Diener, 1986; Vaughan, 2006). The Commission also wanted to break down barriers to higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Diener, 1986; Vaughan, 2000). The Commission wanted to develop a network of community colleges throughout the nation to serve the greater population and provide more access to education by making these community colleges tuition-free, having them serve as cultural centers, and having them offer courses to serve technical courses as well as general education courses (Vaughan, 2000). The Report concluded that post secondary education should be provided to all citizens regardless of the color of their skin, sex, religion, geographical location, or financial condition (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). The Truman Report also coined the term community college as opposed to junior college. The purpose of the community college was to serve all the community and its members (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Vaughan, 1985).

By 1960, community colleges existed in every state (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Enrollment increased from just over 500,000 in 1960 to more than 2 million by 1970, 4 million by 1980, and nearly 6 million by early 1990s (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). World War II, the Great Depression, the Higher Education Act, and changing populations including minority students and women played a tremendous part in the increase of enrollment (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). The
federal government also decided to take access a step further. The Higher Education Act of 1965 made it possible for anyone who could establish financial need to receive assistance from the federal government to attend college ( Vaughan, 2000).

In 1972, the American Association of Junior College changed its name to the American Association of Junior and Community College to reflect the community orientation of community colleges ( Vaughan, 2006). Finally in 1978, California’s Proposition 13 passed which shifted the costs for community colleges from local entities to the state (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). In 1992, the name was changed again to American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, n.d.; Vaughan, 1986).

Initially, the Association of Community Colleges was a forum created for two-year college presidents to formulate and exchange ideas and build policy and leadership skills. “Today the organization has grown to embrace all those who work or study at the community colleges, providing advocacy, leadership, and service for its member institutions” (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2006, p. 2).

Progression of students in higher education.

Initially, higher education was created to meet the needs of European and English wealthy, affluent young men, and a classical education was presented in higher education to teach these young men to practice law, medicine, and the ministry and to become leaders in government sectors (Diener, 1986; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). Only the elite and privileged men went to college (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). These young men went to college to preserve and transmit culture
and tradition (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). Three different philosophical stances about higher education include the Aristocrat view in which only European American males from upper socioeconomic classes attended post secondary school; the Meritocratic view in which college admission is based on academic ability; and the Egalitarian view that everyone should have equal opportunity to access educational opportunities regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sex, or ability (Roueche & Roueche, 1993).

Today more than 6.25 million students are served by the community college in the United States (AACC, 2009). The majority of community college students are usually at risk. Students considered at risk are defined as students who are more likely than their peers to display one or more of the following characteristics: they are first generation learners, have little support, may possess a poor self image, work more than thirty hours a week, may derive from low income families, are economically driven, and may be academically weak (Ender & Wilkie, 2000; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). More than 50% of community college students are identified as at risk (McCabe & Day, 1998; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). At least 89% of community college students are single parents, enrolled full time or part time, have dependents other than a spouse, and/or do not have a high school diploma (NCES, 2003). The average age of community college students is 29 (NCES, 2006). European American students make up the majority of community college students (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2006; Provasnik & Planty, 2008; Roueche & Roueche, 1993).
Almost half of community college freshmen test into remedial courses (McCabe & Day, 1998). According to educational trends, these statistics will not change any time soon (McCabe & Day, 1998).

As the community college began to grow, so did the at risk populations. In order to serve at risk students, institutional policies and state initiatives needed to change. Open access was an integral piece of opening the doors to college to those students who may be at risk. Open access, over the years, has created hundreds of state initiatives supporting open access. The following section will address the arguments for and against open access and why it is pertinent that community colleges remain accessible in order to serve at risk populations.

Open access.

A great debate exists over open access to the community college. On one hand, proponents argue that community colleges need to serve the greatest number of students, and therefore, they must be more accessible (Shannon & Smith, 2006). On the other hand is the argument that open access increases attrition rates in the community colleges (Freer-Weiss, 2004).

If community colleges do not have an open access policy, many of students will not be able to attend college (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Open access assists students who could not otherwise attend college to attain their educational goals (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). Until students are adequately prepared for the
Community colleges are a uniquely American invention. From their start as junior colleges in the early 1900s, these two-year institutions signaled a dramatic change that expanded educational opportunity from only the affluent to include the poorest and most disadvantaged among us. (Fifield, 2006, p. 1)

Because many students who attend the community college come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, low cost is crucial to the open access policy (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Although community college cost has fluctuated over the years, it is still far less expensive to attend a community college (Shannon & Smith, 2006).

Conversely, open access can be detrimental to some students. Some educators feel that open access increases attrition rates (Freer-Weiss, 2004). Some believe that universities and colleges need to be more selective in their admissions and their programs with reason to believe the student will be successful (Freer-Weiss, 2004). Educators addressed concerns that there must be reasonable evidence that a student can meet the scholastic and social requirements for college (Freer-Weiss, 2004). If not, it is unethical to admit students to college knowing that they will not succeed. Students are set up for failure (Freer-Weiss, 2004).

Open access is crucial in order to allow at risk students their right to an education. While many students are not academically prepared for the university level right out of high school, open access is curial (Shannon & Smith, 2006).
straight out of high school, it is vital that at risk students are provided with an opportunity to attend college. The next section will examine at risk students and the barriers students must overcome to achieve their goals.

At-risk students.

As previously mentioned, more than 50% of community college students are identified as at risk (McCabe & Day, 1998; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). Higher education has moved towards serving the general public rather than solely serving the traditionally gifted and elite (McCabe & Day, 1998; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). Many students today come to the community college with deficient basic skills needing remediation, particularly in language and mathematics (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). Community college students are sometimes characterized as having attained a C average in high school, possessing poor study habits, having little support from home, and setting unrealistic goals for themselves (Ender & Wilkie, 2000; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). This population includes students from low income families and ethnic minorities who are often first generation college students, may lack self confidence, come from disadvantaged background, have a history low academic achievement, and may include individuals who are former foster youth and underprepared for college (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Cross, 1971; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). A 1990 report titled *Serving the Underprepared Students* concluded that at risk students encompassed returning adults, high school drop outs, illiterate adults, and
immigrants. They are even more disadvantaged by the same characteristics that have more traditionally described the developmental student (Roueche & Roueche, 1993).

Comparisons of the enrollment of the university freshman and community college freshman are drastically divergent. University bound freshmen have a strong self image and strong family support, and they are academically prepared, goal orientated and competitive (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). The average age of the university bound student 19 to 22 (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). Community college freshmen are usually first generation college students who possess a poor self image, are often members of an ethnic minority, are academically unprepared, have poor scores, and work (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). The average of the community college freshmen is 28 (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). It also should be noted that at risk students may be less likely to attain their educational goals than the larger population (Roueche & Roueche, 1993).

Today, the community college serves a more enriched and diverse population than ever before.

Students vary in terms of sex, age, ethnicity, religion, disability, family history of college attendance, academic intentions, academic preparation, motivational levels, economic backgrounds, learning styles, part time versus full time enrollment status, commitments and obligations outside the college, and English speaking ability. (Hall, 2008, p. 12)
This section offered an overview of the community college movement, open access to college, and the characteristics of the students served in community colleges in the United States. The next section explores foster youth and barriers to success for former foster youth in higher education.

**Former Foster Youth**

Emancipation is defined as the legal process by which a foster youth’s court dependency status is relinquished the State, and the youth becomes legally independent for tax and financial aid purposes. Youth who are aging out of foster care at 18 years of age are often also referred to as emancipating out of foster care (San Diego County Office of Education, 2006). If nothing changes in child welfare trends, by the year 2020, 10,500,000 children will experience the foster care system (Silicon Valley Children’s Fund & San Jose State University, 2007). Every year 4,000 youth emancipate from California’s foster care system upon reaching the age of 18 (Cooper, Mery, & Rassen, 2008). At that age, former foster youth are pushed out into the world without monetary support, family support, a place to live, and often without basic living skills ((Silicon Valley Children’s Fund & San Jose State University, 2007; Merdinger, Hines, Lemon, Wyatt, & Tweed, 2002). Many have been pushed through the system in multiple placements in group homes, foster homes, and temporary living situations (Merdinger, et al, 2002; Supporting Success, 2008). Foster youth may have experienced inconsistent social support, low expectations from caregivers, and maltreatment in foster care (Merdinger, et al,
On average, foster children lose four to six months of educational attainment each year as they change schools which usually signifies a change in their living situation (Merdinger, et al, 2002). Foster children experience at least four different placements while in care, and the longer youth are in foster care, the greater number of placements they receive (Silicon Valley Children’s Fund & San Jose State University, 2007). When school changes occur, educational records may not reach the other school in a timely manner; therefore, students may be placed in inappropriate courses or may have to stay out of school and wait until the records are received (Espana & Fried, 2004). This can also mean that a diagnosis made at one school (i.e., bipolar disorder, depression, learning difference, etc.) may not arrive at the new school, leaving teachers unaware of it (Merdinger, et al, 2002). For example, an unidentified 10-year-old female foster child who is currently in foster care in Los Angeles County, enrolled in a public school where she was assessed for special educational services (Espana & Fried, 2004). It was determined that she qualified for adaptive physical education, resource help, and speech therapy; an IEP (Individualized Educational Program) which outlined these services was developed for her. Her condition was listed as “learning handicapped.” No behavioral problems were indicated in the classroom. Two months later, the student was moved to a group home in a different school district because of behavioral problems in the foster home. A new IEP was created at the new school. No services were included. Her condition was changed to emotionally disturbed. It was later learned that that her
prior education information was not transferred to the new school (Espana & Fried, 2004).

The previous section offered a framework for understanding the experiences of foster youth and former foster youth. The following section will address the barriers former foster youth must overcome in order to attain their academic goals.

*Barriers to success for former foster youth.*

In the United States, 70% of emancipated youth plan to attend college, 3% attempt college, and 1% complete a bachelor’s degree compared to 27% of the general population (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008). Many youth are in survival mode focused on basic needs such as housing, food, transportation and financial aid (Silicon Valley Children’s Fund & San Jose State University, 2007). One youth said,

> When you have to think about “what I am going to eat and how I am going to survive?” you can’t put your full attention on four classes. I was still in survival mode my first year, and astronomy just wasn’t a class that was helping me to survive. (Emerson, 2007, p. 9)

Housing often provides the first barrier to college. Many colleges which provide on campus housing require students to move out for holiday breaks and summer (Emerson, 2007; Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008). Former foster youth usually have no place to go during these breaks and do not get monetary support from family members because they usually have no family (Emerson, 2007).
Therefore, youth are left homeless during those times (Emerson, 2007). One 18-year-old college student and former foster youth lived in a dozen foster care homes while growing up (Emerson, 2007). She attended eight high schools, but she overcame her spotty educational background, was accepted to San Diego State, and chose that school because they had on campus housing. She did not realize that she would end up back on the streets during one semester break of her freshmen year and ended up living in her car (Emerson, 2007). Most studies have found that 20 to 36 percent of homeless people have been in foster care, and nearly one-fifth of young adults who leave foster care experience homelessness at some point after the age of 18 (Cooper, Mery & Rassen 2008; Emerson, 2007).

Another barrier for youth transitioning into college is financial aid. Many youth do not attend college because they cannot afford it due to the fact that they are low income and lack the ability to pay for college (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008). Often, they do not have monetary support from family to assist with the cost of education (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008). Youth express relief when they do not need to worry about rent, food, and books (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008). They noted that having enough money to pay for school and living expenses as their top concern in attending college (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008).

Due to the low retention rates with youth in college, it is vital that they receive more assistance with financial aid (Emerson, 2007). The Chafee grant, Guardian Scholars program, and Extended Opportunities Programs and Services
(EOPS) are three programs that provide youth with more financial support (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008). One former foster youth stated, “The Chafee grant has truly helped me stay in school. I cannot afford to pay my rent with the hours that I work while being in school half time” (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008, p. 11). The Chafee grant is a grant in the amount of $5,000 per year given to former foster youth students who are currently enrolled in college (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008). Students are only available for the award up to the age of 22 (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008).

Another barrier to college is academic preparedness of foster youth. Since youth change schools so frequently, they have lower grade point averages, earn fewer credits towards graduation, have lower test scores on state testing, and are more likely to be placed in special education (Silicon Valley Children’s Fund, San Jose State University, 2007). Many youth are deficient in basic reading, writing, and mathematics competencies (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008). The ability to move quickly into careers for youth is extremely important for those who struggle financially and seek to become self-sufficient (Cooper, Mery & Rassen, 2008). Students who test into remedial coursework and students defined as at risk are less likely to persist in college (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). This can be very discouraging for them. College students transitioning from foster care require more attention than first generation college students; therefore, there needs to be more support services in place for them (Merdinger, et al, 2002). Little is known, and little
has been studied about former foster youth currently enrolled in post secondary education (Merdinger, Hines, Lemon, Wyatt & Tweed, 2002). Few studies have been conducted to follow the successes of foster youth who make it through college and succeed academically (Merdinger, et al, 2002). Unfortunately, research conducted on youth primarily targets the negative outcomes such as of out-of-home care, including homelessness, dependence on public assistance, substance abuse, increased psychological distress, and lack of educational achievement (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001).

The previous section presented barriers that foster youth and former foster youth endure not only in the K-12 school system but also in higher education. The following section will address the conclusions based on current research noted in this literature review.

Summary

Community colleges are a byproduct of advanced high schools dating back to early 1900s. They have revolutionized higher education over the past 100 years, providing opportunities to all students interested in attaining a college degree. The community college serves as a melting pot for a more diverse population than ever before. From the elite and wealthy to the at risk student, the community college has shown itself to be a place people can go to attain their educational goals. However, some populations of students require additional support in order to be successful, and this is especially true for college students transitioning from foster care to the
community college. They often do not receive adequate support and services they need in order to be successful in college. Many barriers lie in the way for former foster youth success as they are not adequately equipped with life skills due to a lack of support and guidance. There seems to be a big gap in the persistence rates of foster youth from kindergarten through high school. The purpose of this study is to gain a better perspective on former foster youth, their life experiences, collegial experiences, and perceptions on programs and services that assisted them in meeting their academic goals, answering the question: What kinds of support and personal characteristics assist former foster youth in entering and successfully completing college?

The next chapter will explore the methodology used to study types of support that enhanced the educational experiences of a group of former foster youth who completed some form of higher education.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The California Foster Youth system has been in existence for more than 40 years. On any given day, 500,000 youth are in the foster care system (Casey Family Programs, Annual Report, 2008). Fewer than 3% graduate from college. This topic is emotionally taxing for those who have been in the foster care system at some point in their lives. This chapter will outline the development of an online qualitative questionnaire which surveyed a very small population of former foster youth nationwide. It describes the development of the research instrument, participant recruitment, and data collection.

Development of Research Instrument

The initial survey I compiled consisted of 10 qualitative questions. I asked questions such as, “Did you have any role models? At what age were you placed in the foster care system? Were you ever adopted? What services were utilized while in college? What age they were placed in the foster care system?” Five out of the 10 questions were multiple choice with very little opportunity for participants to expand on their answers. Because I was interested as well in having the participants provide rich text, I realized that I needed to ask more in-depth questions. With careful review of each question, I went back and asked myself, “What am I asking in this question? Will this question assist me in my quest for the kind of information I am looking for?
in conducting my research? How do these questions relate to my topic?” After asking myself these questions, some common themes of interest emerged: demographics, persistence and resiliency, personal/college support, and fears. This helped me to narrow down the specificity of the kinds of data that could prove useful in answering this study’s central question. After several drafts, my survey seemed clearer and more concise yet still could provide an in-depth view of the lives of former foster youth. I expanded my questions to 16 and asked more in-depth questions based on the five common themes. I compiled a qualitative online questionnaire to obtain answers to questions about the experiences of former foster youth who had successfully completed some form of higher education (e.g., A.A., B.A., M.A., Ph.D., M.D., etc.). The final survey consisted of 16 qualitative questions, nine of which were multiple choice, four were essay questions, and three were rated scale questions. (See Appendix A for the final survey.) The final questionnaire was comprised of the following questions broken down based on the themes listed above.

The following three questions were included in order to provide insight into the participants’ past to determine if these factors could have potentially had some personal impact on the participants in terms of finishing their educational goals:

- At what age did you enter the foster care system?
- How many different placements did you have?
- Were you ever adopted?
The next five questions were included in order to provide information on respondents’ academic backgrounds, resiliency, and role models, and to ascertain if their role models made a difference in terms of college-going persistence:

- What is your highest degree you have received?
- Where did you get your degree?
- Did you have role models as you were growing up?
- How did they impact your life?
- What was their relationship to you?

“Support of positive adults in the lives of foster youth is crucial, as this population is extremely vulnerable due to their challenging life experiences” (Duarte, 2008, p.4).

The following three questions were asked to determine if the participants used college support and personal support and whether that had any effect on participants’ completion of educational goals:

- While in higher education, what types of support systems did you have?
- At your institution how often did you utilize the following services?
- While in college, did you take any of the following courses?

The following three questions were used to ascertain common fears among this targeted population and to determine if respondents were able to overcome their fears and how they did so:
• When faced with stressful situations in your life while you were in college, how did you deal with them?

• What were some of the biggest concerns and/or fears you had when you started college?

The next two questions were asked to discover the levels of commitment, determination, and motivation of the participants:

• What were some of the long term goals you had set for yourself while in college?

• To what extent did each of the following motivate you to finish college?

On nine out of 16 questions, the survey provided participants the opportunity to elaborate on their answers by placing narrative responses in a text box.

Recruitment of Participants

Since my target population is so small, and because many former foster youth do not want to self identify, I determined that my best approach to maximize the pool of potential respondents was to provide a link to the survey and email the link to willing liaisons. The link to the survey was sent throughout California via email covering all levels of higher education: the California Community College system, the California State University system, and the University of California system. The link was also sent at the national level utilizing assistance from Casey Family Programs. Casey Family Programs is a foundation entirely focused on foster care that works to improve, provide, and prevent a need for foster care in the United
States. Specifically, this survey targeted alumni of this Foundation. In addition, I utilized the California Community College Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) listserv to send out the link to the survey. The listserv is an announcement-only e-mail discussion list used by all liaisons and regional representatives. FYSI is a strong foundation of individuals representing a myriad of agencies and postsecondary educational institutions that have formed a collaborative effort that has evolved to become a statewide taskforce. The goals of this initiative are to improve access to student services and resources, academic support, student retention, students’ academic performance, students’ completion of units, their completion of programs and degree, and transfer rates to baccalaureate. I also worked closely with a contact at the California Community Colleges’ Chancellor’s office to promote access to my survey and to increase response rates. I primarily relied on the snowball methodology as I requested colleagues nationwide to forward the link to potential participants.

Participants who completed the survey implied their consent to participate in this research and were fully informed of the voluntary nature and purpose of this study. Participants were all made aware that the survey was anonymous. Because I collected no identity or contact information, I neither met with any of the respondents for this study nor did I contact them via telephone.
Activation of the Survey

The survey first became available during Thanksgiving week. Data collection was stagnant for some time. One week into the collection process, and after four surveys were collected, a participant noticed that questions 10, 14, and 15, which used a rating scale, would only allow one answer for each column. The problem was immediately addressed and fixed. This may have skewed the results. Two weeks into the data collection, four more surveys were completed for a total of eight. During the third week of data collection, two more surveys were submitted which made for 10 surveys total.

A follow up email was sent in January to all California Community Colleges, California State University system, and the Casey Family Programs Alumni Association. Immediately, six more surveys were completed, and within the next two weeks, I received an additional five more responses for a total of 21 respondents.

Data Assessment Procedure

After 14 weeks, I received 21 completed surveys and closed the survey by disabling the link. Of the 21 completed surveys, only 19 were analyzed because two of the survey respondents were still in pursuit of an associate’s degree or higher and had not yet completed a degree. After I closed the survey, I printed out the results and organized them into a research binder. To organize the survey results, I created sections and labeled them Q. 1 through Q. 16 which stood for question one, question two, and so forth. For the majority of questions, I utilized a coding system and
interpreted the data using a code book. For each question beginning with question six (as questions one through five were simply tabulated), I grouped participants’ answers based on categories. For example, after reading through all of the answers to question six, I summarized the answers based on three categories: professionals, relatives, and foster parents. I did the same for the results of question seven. I read through all of the answers and came up with four common themes: hope, inspiration, compassion, and self worth. I followed this same process for questions eight and nine. For demographic and support services questions, I simply tabulated the results. To interpret the data collected, I looked for reoccurring themes.

**Summary**

Through the four stages implementing, administration of the survey and data collection, I was able to analyze 19 surveys. In the next chapter I will discuss the results.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of participants’ demographics as well as their responses to each of the following topics: role models, support system(s), barriers to higher education, and goals and motivations as described in Chapter Three.

You may notice that the data presented in this chapter may not add up to 100% and that is because on many of the questions, I asked participants to “check all answers that apply”.

Participant Demographics

A total of 21 former foster youth completed the survey but only 19 surveys were analyzed. Five percent of respondents entered the foster care system from birth to one-year of age, ages two to six (16%), ages seven to ten (21%), and ages 11 to 18 (63%).

For the purpose of this study, the term placement is defined as a temporary placement of a child outside of the home of the biological parents. Children are placed with a foster family by the state's Child Welfare organization, usually due to abuse, neglect, illness, or abandonment or in situations in which parents are unable to fulfill their parenting obligations because of illness, emotional problems, or a host of other reasons including adoption. Respondents reported having experienced varying
numbers of placements throughout their childhood and adolescence. Sixty-three percent reported that they had one to three placements, four to six placements (16%), and 10 or more placements (21%). One hundred percent of the respondents reported that they had not been adopted.

Respondents reported earning degrees ranging from Associate of Arts to Juris Doctorate. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the degrees earned by the participants.

Table 4.1

*Degrees Attained by the Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
<th>Degree Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>Juris doctorate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institutions represented in this study include University of California (UC) San Diego, UC Berkeley, California State University (CSU) Monterey Bay, Middle Tennessee State University, CSU Chico, CSU East Bay, Princeton, Stanford University, CSU East Bay, CSU Fresno, Ball State University, Cuyamaca Community College, Orange Coast College, Foothill Community College, San Joaquin Community College, National University, and Azusa Pacific University.
Participants’ Experiences in Higher Education

This section explores the experiences of the respondents in higher education.

Mentors.

Eighty-nine percent of respondents reported having had a role model. Role models ranged from family members to foster parents to professionals. One participant who graduated from an out-of-state university noted that her mentor was “my attorney who represented me while in foster care. She really took an interest in my case and me. She was also my friend.” A Stanford graduate who had 10 or more placements while in foster care explained her relationship with her mentor, stating, (My mentor) was the director of a prestigious summer program where I was admitted. She taught me to value my own intrinsic worth as a person (partly because I could sense her valuing my qualities with genuineness) ... things such as my ability to be introspective and to resonate with other people's emotions), she also helped me to grow in areas where I was weak (and she was strong) such as how to be a good listener, and ultimately she coached me through the nuts and bolts of applying to a prestigious university.

A lawyer and graduate of Princeton University said that he had four male role models including his high school football coach. When asked how the role models impacted his life, he simply stated, “They gave me hope.”
Support services.

Respondents reported having a wide variety of support services while in college. Figure 4.1 depicts those services.

Figure 4.1

Types of Support Services Accessed by Participants

When asked how often participants utilized support services, 75% said they often utilized Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS), 20% utilized Admissions, 47% utilized personal counseling, 75% often utilized Academic Advising 23% often utilized tutoring, and 90% reported that they used financial aid services. No one reported utilizing Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) while in higher education,
**Coping strategies.**

Participants reported that they used a wide variety of coping strategies when dealing with stressful situations in college. They included:

- Exercising
- Spending time with family and friends
- Studying
- Participating in extracurricular activities
- Participating in sports
- Asking for assistance from teachers
- Asking for assistance from academic advisors
- Asking for assistance from a personal counselor

As the Stanford University alumnus stated,

> Often stress is one factor that contributed to my overall sense of loneliness in college, which was difficult to experience. Ultimately other people are the most powerful helpers that could've helped me relieve stress, but I felt so alone at times.

An alumnus from CSU Monterey Bay, who was placed into foster care between the ages of two to six and who also had 10 different placements while in the system, stated, “I had issues with asking for help. I had a couple of very unsuccessful
semesters in college that were difficult to overcome, but I managed to graduate in five years. I didn't always utilize positive coping mechanisms.”

_Fears and concerns._

Sixty-eight percent of respondents expressed the lack of a support system as a concern or fear while preparing to begin college, concern with having to work while in college (68%), fear that he or she would not be able to do well in coursework (63%), (63%) fearful that the workload would be too much to handle, worried about whether he or she could pay for college (53%), scared of failure (47%), worried about acceptance from peers and professors (26%). One participant, who aged out of the system and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree, was given custody of her younger sibling who was under the age of 18 at the time, went on to express that “child care was also a huge concern for me since I had custody of my younger sister.” Another participant stated, “I was worried about my family, particularly my younger brothers. I moved about 300 miles away to go to school, and I felt immense guilt for leaving family behind.” A UC San Diego graduate who was placed 10 or more times while in the system was “afraid I would not have time or money to help my sisters’ transition after ageing out. What would all the added stress do to my anxiety and depression issues?”

_Long-term goals._

Seventy-four percent of the participants graduated from college with an associate’s degree or higher as a long-term goal, wanted to obtain a professional
degree (master’s degree, doctorate, etc.) (74%), wanted to secure employment (58%), wanted to find a career (84%), wanted to start a family (32%), and provide stability for themselves and their family (79%). Illiterate until the age of 10, a CSU Monterey alumna said, “My main concern was having a place to live, passing my classes so that I could graduate and find a career.” Another participant, currently pursuing a doctoral degree, stated, “(I wanted to) find a way to give back to the community through my educational gifts.” A community college graduate added, “(I want to) manage my own nonprofit all girls group home.”

Motivations to complete college.

One hundred percent of respondents cited pride as the factor that motivated them to finish college. Other highly rated motivators included future financial stability (94%), self-esteem (93%), self-confidence (93%), a mentor or instructor (88%), future security (87%) knowledge (80%), a sense of obligation (73%), a job or career (73%), family (60%), and college staff (50%). Less frequently cited motivators included peers (43%), school clubs (36%), and coaches (20%).

One participant’s motivation was “the fear of ending up like my parents and having to go back to being poor was a huge motivator. I also was determined not to allow my little sister and my own family (husband and kids) to ever struggle the way my family did.” Another participant said, “I didn’t want to be another statistic.”

When asked about the challenges participants experienced while in college, they cited lack of emotional support (69%), lack of social support (53%), lack of
academic preparedness (50%), lack of housing (33%), and lack of financial aid (30%). One participant who was placed in the foster care system from as a very young child said, “I was on the verge of becoming homeless at one point in my college career, and I noticed a drop in my grades so housing was very important”.

*Support courses.*

Participants reported taking some support courses throughout their time in higher education, including life skills (60%), orientation (50%), student success (50%), and guidance (20%). They made no comments about these support courses.

*Summary*

Nineteen former foster youth completed the survey described in detail in the previous chapter. All had participated in high education from community college to law school, earning degrees from Associate of Arts to Juris Doctorate. They provided insight into their experiences in higher education in the areas of mentors, support services, coping strategies, fears and concerns, long-terms goals, motivators for college completion, and their usage of college support courses. The next chapter will provide an analysis of these results.
CHAPTER FIVE
ANAYSIS

Introduction

The question that guided this study was: What support and personal characteristics assist former foster youth in entering and succeeding in college?

The following is an analysis of the data broken down into three major categories: mentor/role models, financial aid, and utilization of campus services.

Participants’ Life Experiences Prior to Higher Education

As stated in the previous chapter, 100% of the participants in this survey were never adopted. Thus, they were in and out of group homes, foster homes, juvenile detentions, and orphanages, and it is highly probable that they did not have a stable place to live, nor did they receive emotional, mental, and psychological support through their formative years. Participants belonged to the state from which they originated. Unfortunately, once foster youth turn 18, they are forced out of the system with little guidance and little to no support unless they already have a mentor or a role model.

Given the instability of their previous life situations, their success in higher education runs completely counter to what most education professionals would predict. I can only posit that their personal characteristics, which will be discussed later, played a large role in their success.
Mentor/Role Models

In this study, 95% of participants had a role model and/or a mentor while in college, ranging from a lawyer to a foster parent to a college employee. Former foster youth need support and often times do not know how to ask for it. Those who have a support system in place have a higher success rate in college. This study suggests role models to be instrumental in giving participants hope and guidance. As one youth put it simply, “She took an interest in me.” It can also be inferred that because of the mentorship they received, the participants demonstrated higher levels of self worth, self advocacy, perseverance, and resiliency.

Another implication of this research suggests if former foster youth do not have a role model in their lives, their chances of completing college may be reduced. Eighty-three percent of the mentors encouraged the participants that college was the key to success. They saw education as a way out of the poverty experienced by most former foster youth.

Thus, mentors played a significant role in helping former foster believe in themselves, map out a route to success, overcome obstacles, persevere in spite of difficulties, and view college-going as a viable option in their lives.

Support Services

This study suggests that Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS), financial aid, and academic advising were key factors in fostering participants’ educational goals.
EOPS.

EOPS provides emotional, monetary, and academic support for underserved students. Student must demonstrate both monetary need and academic need for this program. All former foster youth who age out of the system qualify for EOPS. This program has trained counselors on staff to support students while in college. EOPS also provides extra monetary support (i.e., gas cards, food cards, bus passes, school supplies, etc.).

Seventy-four percent of participants in this study indicated that EOPS was a big part of their support system while in college. Thus, former foster youth did appear to take advantage of the services provided in EOPS and to recognize the centrality of these services to their success in higher education.

Financial aid.

Ninety-five percent of the participants indicated that financial aid was important to their academic success. Former foster youth must get financial aid to help supplement income to assist with the cost of college attendance. Cost of attendance is defined as tuition and fees, books, supplies, transportation, personal items, room and board, dependent care and miscellaneous items. As noted in the previous chapter, 68% of participants were fearful of the impact of having to work while going to college. The majority of former foster youth has no choice but to work while going to college to offset the cost of living and to supplement what financial aid could provide. In some cases, participants had custody of siblings who
were still under the age of 18 and needed support (i.e., emotional, monetary, and psychological).

Given the difficult financial situation in which former foster youth find themselves, adequate financial aid, including scholarships programs, is central to their college success as they attempt to juggle responsibility for their own lives and in some cases the lives of dependent siblings as well. Lacking adequate financial assistance appears to place former foster youth in jeopardy of leaving school prior to completion of their academic goals.

*Academic advising.*

Academic advising provides assistance to students in their long-term and short-term academic planning. Seventy-five percent of participants indicated that academic advising was important to their academic success. Thus, students who meet with an academic advisor on a regular basis are more apt to be successful in college. Making a connection between former foster youth and skilled academic advisors who understand both the obstacles they have had to overcome and those still in their path as they pursue a college degree may provide the structured long-term planning opportunities that these youth need in order to persevere in higher education.

*Support courses.*

Most institutions require all freshmen take one or more support courses (i.e., a life skills course, a guidance course, an orientation course, and/or a student success
course) in their first year of college regardless of their demographic background. Forty seven percent of the respondents in this study skipped this question completely. From this I can infer that students do not necessarily have to take a support course to be successful in higher education. Support courses are routinely touted as offering key advantages to students new to higher education, but it can be that other support mechanisms, including a one-on-one mentor and a strong academic advisor as mentioned above, have a stronger impact on the college success rates of former foster youth. Having a consistent, supportive adult may provide a greater protective capacity than taking a course of how to successful in college.

**Participant Characteristics**

Characteristics, such as individuality, personality, uniqueness, and distinctiveness, define who we are and set us apart from others. Former foster youth display many distinct characteristics. Self worth, self advocacy, perseverance, and resiliency are four characteristics respondents revealed in their responses in regard to their coping strategies, fears and concerns, and long-term goals, as will be discussed in the next three sections.

*Coping strategies.*

One of the biggest dilemmas for former foster youth in college is asking for help. The participants in this study learned how to ask for assistance, both personal and academic. They also felt a sense of loneliness when they first embarked on their educational journey. If their feelings were not validated by adults, they may shut
down emotionally and mentally. This study suggests that participants in this study learned to ask for help, reached out to others, and utilized self-advocacy that enabled them to meet their educational goals, and that a variety of people (college employees, mentors, peers, etc.) cared enough to help them.

Additional coping strategies utilized by participants included support of family and friends; assistance from personal counselors, college professors, and academic advisors; involvement in extracurricular activities; and studying.

_Fears and concerns._

Participants in this study rose above their fears as evidenced in their degree attainment. One hundred percent of the participants in this study achieved a college degree. Despite their bleak upbringing, they achieved success in higher education. For example, the respondent who raised her younger sister while in college overcame her fears and managed her concerns to achieve success and to serve as a role model to her sister. Such a high rate of success is startling, even more so when participants’ lives prior to higher education are taken into consideration. This is a population of students who would not be predicted to succeed in higher education, yet all of them did succeed and achieved their educational goals, despite their fears, concerns, and lack of parental/guardian support. They are characterized by strong resiliency and a positive sense of self worth.
Long term goals.

One hundred percent of participants in this study indicated that they had set long term goals for themselves. Thus, they were not focused only on the present but rather could envision a future for themselves different from their current lives, saw college as a viable option, and could see a path to success for themselves. Given their lives prior to college, this is remarkable. Establishment of long-term goals appears to be a key to the success of this population of college students.

Summary

Former foster youth are able to enter and successfully complete college when they have strong role models; campus support programs; personal characteristics that include sense of self worth, ability to advocate for themselves, perseverance, and resiliency; and financial aid. The next chapter will examine the limitations of the research, offer conclusions, and provide suggestions for future research in the area of former foster youth and higher education.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

Given the complexity of the educational system today, college can be complex and confusing for many students, especially for former foster youth who lack many of the supports necessary for college success. This research revealed that scaffolding specific kinds of support may assist in increasing the college-going success of former foster youth. This support includes making a personal relationship with a role model or mentor early on; participating in support services for students; applying for financial aid; establishing a connection with an academic advisor, counselor, and/or professor; establishing short-term and long term goals; and involvement in campus activities. The next sections describe the limitations of this study and the implications for future research.

Limitations of the Research

This study included several specific limitations. Time was a significant factor as I allotted myself a month and a half for participant recruitment. Moreover, this study was conducted as a master’s thesis to complete a Master of Arts in Education and as such had a specific time limitation for thesis completion.

I live in a rural area where the number of former foster youth is less than it is in major urban areas which posed a difficulty in the recruitment of participants. I had to rely on colleagues nationwide to assist me in recruiting participants through
forwarding the link to my survey via email to potential participants. Additionally, I was concerned that some questions I wanted to ask might cause potential participants to decide not to complete the survey. Thus, I deleted questions from the original survey that would have provided me with participants’ contact information, their current occupations, and information about their current or past issues with drug addiction or alcohol abuse. By adding these questions, I believe I would have gotten a deeper look into the participants’ lives, and my awareness would have added more meaningful context. Furthermore, if I had contact information on the participants, I could have contacted them to ask additional in-depth questions that may have provided a more nuanced picture of their experiences in higher education. Finally, the survey could have been strengthened, as was noted by one participant, by the inclusion of scales that would have allowed respondents to rank, for example, how central each coping mechanism was in helping them deal with stress.

Implications for Future Research

Because of the relative paucity of research on former foster youth and higher education, it would be beneficial for additional research to consider the kinds of support foster youth need in order to see college as a viable option in their futures. This study focused on former foster youth who had achieved success in higher education and as such provides information that can inform colleges and universities interested in scaffolding support for this population of students so as to assist them in persevering and achieving success at their institutions. What forms of support would
help adolescents still in the foster care system view higher education as part of their life path? Additionally, how do the college completion rates of former foster youth compare across cultures? What support program(s) can be created solely for the purpose of promoting former foster youth in higher education? At what age should we target foster youth and assist them through the K-12 system and college?

Adolescents who age out of the foster care system are a vulnerable population. A committed mentor can be, as James Comer once noted, the meaningful adult in their lives, helping them to create long-term goals that include higher education and to see those goals through to fruition. The absence of biological or adoptive family does not have to mean that these young people must languish without direction. The key, as revealed in this research, is connection with caring adults who offer guidance, hope, direction, and motivation to set their goals high and to persevere in their quest to achieve them.
REFERENCES


Silicon Valley Children’s Fund & San Jose State University. (October, 2007). Paper presented at the conference titled Creating a Blueprint: Building Support for Students from Foster Care on Higher Education Campuses, San Jose, CA.


APPENDIX A

ONLINE QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

Question: What kinds of support and personal characteristics assist former foster youth in entering and successfully completing college?

Overview: You are being asked to participate in a study focused on learning about the support systems that can assist former foster youth in being successful in higher education.

Informed Consent: By completing this anonymous survey, you are implying your consent to participate in this research which has the potential to benefit foster youth and former foster youth in being successful in higher education. If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at, Jennifer Bailey, by at jlbail02@boglobal.net or my committee chair Dr. Ann Diver-Stamnes at acd1@humboldt.edu. The results of this research will be available in the form of a Master’s thesis in the Humboldt State University library. Thank you for your participation.

Questionnaire:

At what age did you enter the foster care system?
   A. 0-1 years old
   B. 2-6 years old
   C. 7-10 years old
   D. 11-18 years old

How many different placements did you have?
   A. 1-3
   B. 4-6
   C. 7-9
   D. 10 or more

Were you ever adopted?
   A. Yes
   B. No
What is the highest degree you have received?
A. Associate’s degree
B. Bachelor’s degree
C. Master’s degree
D. Doctoral degree
E. MD
F. Juris Doctorate

Where did you get your degree?

Did you have role models growing up? If so, who were they?

How did they impact your life?

What was their relationship to you?

While in higher education, what types of support systems did you have? Please check all that apply.
A. EOPS (Extended Opportunities Programs and Services)
B. Professor
C. College staff member(s)
D. Family
E. Mentor
F. Counselor

At your institution how often did you utilize the following services?
A. EOPS (Extended Opportunities Programs and Services)
B. Admissions
C. Personal counseling
D. Academic Advising
E. DSPS (Disable Students Programs and Services)
F. Tutoring
G. Financial Aid (Pell grant, Cal grant, Renaissance Scholars Program, Guardian Scholars Program)
When faced with stressful situations in your life while you were in college, how did you deal them? Please check all that apply.

A. Exercised
B. Spent time with family and friends
C. Studied
D. Participated in extracurricular activities
E. Participated in sports
F. Sought assistance from teachers
G. Sought assistance from academic advisors
H. Sought assistance from a personal counselor
I. All of the above

What were some of the biggest concerns and/or fears you had when you started college? Please check all that apply.

A. Afraid I would fail
B. Concerned I had no support system
C. Worried about whether I could pay for college
D. Afraid that I would not be able to do well in my coursework
E. Worried about the impact of having to work while in college
F. Worried that school workload would be too much for me
G. Worried that my peers or professors would not accept me

What were some of the long term goals you set for yourself while in college?

A. Graduate from college with an associate’s degree or higher
B. Obtain a professional degree (Master’s degree, doctoral degree, etc…)
C. Get a job
D. Find a career
E. Start a family
F. Provide stability for yourself and/or family
To what extent did each of the following motivate you to finish college?
   A. Mentor/Instructor
   B. Obligation
   C. Self esteem
   D. Family
   E. Particular job/career
   F. Financial stability
   G. Prestige
   H. Knowledge
   I. Peer support
   J. Self confidence
   K. Pride
   L. College staff
   M. School coach
   N. School clubs
   O. Personal security

To what extent were the following a challenge to your success in college?
   A. Lack of financial aid
   B. Lack of academic preparedness
   C. Lack of social support
   D. Lack of emotional support
   E. Lack of housing

While in college did you take any of the following courses?
   A. Guidance courses
   B. Orientation courses
   C. Life skills courses
   D. Student success courses