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Aged Out and On Their Own: Higher Education Experiences of Former Foster Youth

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Title: Aged Out and On Their Own: Higher Education Experiences of Former Foster Youth

Author: Theresa Moy

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Running Head: Higher Education

Aged Out and On Their Own:

Higher Education Experiences of Former Foster Youth

Theresa Moy

Macalester College

Abstract

This study aims to better understand the characteristics, challenges, and outcomes of former foster youth in higher education. Phase I of the study utilized quantitative data to examine the resiliency characteristics of underclassmen and students with higher academic standings in higher education. It was hypothesized that former foster youth with more higher education experiences would be more likely to possess resiliency characteristics. Results from Phase I indicated that students with higher academic standings do not necessarily possess more resiliency characteristics overall. Interesting, underclassmen students have more social support than students with higher academic standings. Phase II of the study involved in-depth interviews with students currently in school and those who have dropped out recently. The results of Phase II indicate that both continuing students and students who are not currently in school face similar barriers such as not having adequate medical care, lack of financial resources, and lack of permanency and social support. Former foster youth provide policy recommendations for combating the barriers to higher education.

Higher Education Experiences of Former Foster Youth

There are approximately 500,000 children in the U.S. foster care system today (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Every year, about 20,000 foster youth "age out" of the system at age 18 or 21 (USGAO, 1999), meaning they are no longer eligible to receive foster care benefits and be under the protection of child welfare services. Children and adolescents enter the foster care system primarily due to neglect and abuse. Once in foster care, the goal of the system is reunification with the family or adoption of the youth. However, in cases where reunification is not possible and adoption options may be limited due to a youth's age, these young people simply wait until they come out of the care of the foster care system. Regardless of the level of preparedness that a youth may have acquired, foster youth are usually forced out of the foster care system without a safety net. This paper will focus on the resiliency characteristics of former foster youth as well as identify the needs of this population from the youths' perspectives in regards to achieving success in higher education.

Resources for Former Foster Youth

For the large numbers of youth who age out of the system, resources are available to meet their needs when it comes to living on their own and pursuing higher education. In order to prepare foster youth for independence and a successful transition into adulthood after exiting the foster care system, the government spent at least $126 million dollars in 1998 for foster youth who were going to leave the system within two to three years (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1999). Although funding is available, not every youth has access to these resources. In 1998, approximately 77,000 youth in foster care were eligible for federal Independent Living Program (ILP) services (older than 16), but only 42,600 youth actually received ILP services

either because they volunteered to not participate in ILP or due to other barriers to program participation (United States Government Accounting Office, 1999). Furthermore, some of the money allocated by the government goes towards the administration of programs. Therefore, less money is available for foster youth.

The amount of resources available for foster youth often is not enough to meet the needs of foster youth in transition. For older youth in care, their needs for transition into adulthood are different from their non-foster youth peers, as they most likely do not have parents helping them after leaving the system. Some of their needs include, but are not limited to: stable living situations; healthy friendships with peers; stable connections to schools; educational skills remediation; dental, medical, and vision care; mental health services; consistent, positive adults in their lives; and networks of social support. Another important need of foster youth is life-skills preparation that includes daily living tasks, self-care, social development, career development, study skills, money management, self-determination, self-advocacy, and housing and community resources (Massinga &Pecora, 2004).

In an effort to increase the resources and support for youth in transition, the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program was established in 1999 (CFCIP; named after Senator John H. Chafee for his commitment to children in foster care) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Independent Living Programs (ILP) is one of the key components of the CFCIP. After the CFCIP passed in 1999, the five goals of ILP are to, 1) increase identification and outreach to youth who are likely to be in foster care until age 18; 2) the provision of education and training necessary for employment; 3) preparing ILP participants for postsecondary education; 4) the provision of emotional and personal support to youth aging out of care; and 5) the provision of a range of services to former foster youth ages 18 to 21. This program expanded

several resources for youth in transition including, but not limited to: extended eligibility for transition assistance to former foster care children up to age 21 (previously only up to age 18); doubled funding for independent-living services to $140 million and established a $500,000 minimum allotment for states; permitted states to use federal funds to support a variety of financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate supports and independent-living services for all children likely to remain in foster care until age 18 and to help those children make the transition to self sufficiency; allowed states to use 30% of funds for room and board for youths ages 18 to 21 transitioning from foster care; gave states the option to extend Medicaid to older youths transitioning from foster care; and required child welfare agencies to document effectiveness of their efforts to help their former charges become self-sufficient.

A study by Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger (2005) highlights the role of ILP for youth in transition. This study utilized data from the larger Pathways to College study (Merdinger et al, 2005) by comparing ILP youth with non-ILP youth in higher education. The ILP group was more likely to have been taught concrete skills such as how to open a bank account, find a job (only marginally significant), budget money, balance a checkbook, and find a place to live (Lemon et al., 2005). Some psycho-emotional/social skills taught to the ILP group included how to set and achieve goals, ask people for help, and find opportunities for training and education. Similarly, the ethnographic data of interviews with caseworkers from Lemon et al. (2005) found that the instructional model focuses on concrete skills. Furthermore, findings from the USGAO (1999) survey of ILP coordinators in every state including the District of Columbia also indicated that the instructional model was most widely used. The benefit of using the instructional model is questionable because there is currently no evidence that the concrete skills learned are actually

applied to independent living. Both ILP and non-ILP youth indicated that foster and/or group home parents taught them independent living skills while in foster care. This shows that the acquisition of independent living skills may not fully be attributed to ILP. Similarly, Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, and Nesmith (2001) found that 39% of older adolescent foster youth obtained independent living skills training from foster parents. It is interesting to note that ILPs do not generally coordinate services with foster group home/kincare parents (Lemon et al., 2005).

One benefit of the ILP services offered was that ILP youth were more likely to stay in contact with their past caseworkers and counselors (Lemon et al., 2005). In addition, Waldinger and Furman (1994) commented on the strong and consistent connection between a youth and the non-parent supportive adult as a protective factor. McMillen, Rideout, Fischer and Tucker (1997) also found it beneficial when ILP workers provided resources and emotional support to ILP youth. Lemon et al's (2005) study found that more ILP youth went into college at a younger age than non-ILP youth. This finding suggests that ILP youth went straight into college while non-ILP youth worked a few years before attending college. Although going straight into college does not necessarily translate as a benefit, this finding suggests that ILP youth may have more higher education opportunities than non-ILP youth. ILP coordinators mentioned four types of college preparation services: financial aid and college application workshops, tours of 4-year universities, higher education scholarships, and SAT preparation courses. This may further illustrate the lack of information on financial aid and scholarships and other resources available for former foster youth pursuing higher education. Non-ILP youth from relative care may be less likely to know about the resources available, and thus less likely to immediately pursue higher education after emancipation.

It was also found that ILP participants had more out-of-home placements and were more likely to be placed in a nonrelative foster home or group home (Lemon et al, 2005). Although significance was marginal, it was also found that the ILP youth was more likely to receive tutoring in high school. Lemon et al (2005) suggested that these findings may indicate that ILP youth had more placement instabilities, were less likely to receive help from relatives while in foster care, and may have more of a need for educational assistance than non-ILP youth. A number of possibilities for these differences exist. Youth with placement instabilities and educational disruptions may come to the attention of caseworkers more often than the non-ILP youth. The ILP youth may be considered more at-risk. Similarly, Mech et al.'s (1994) study found that older adolescent foster youth from group home and other institutional settings had lower levels of life skills knowledge than youth in scattered-site apartments or foster family placements. Furthermore, Iglehart (1994) found that older adolescent foster youth with more out-of-home placements were less likely to transition to being on their own. Since most non-ILP youth are from relative care, it is also possible that ILP is not as widely marketed to relative caregivers. Foster youth in relative care also may have more support and guidance from their caregivers that nonrelative care youth. It is also possible that the ILP youth voluntarily entered into the ILP (Lemon et al, 2005). Whatever the circumstances may be, ILP may serve as an external protective factor for foster youth at-risk for developmental failure when they leave the system. ILP programs provide young people with independent living skills and healthy relationships. These resources may be difficult for older adolescent foster youth to locate themselves. Overall, ILP programs can be beneficial to young people who are going to or have aged out of the foster care system.

Outcomes of Former Foster Youth

Despite the increased support in federal funding to help foster youth, research on the outcomes of former foster youth is often negative. Former foster youth often face homelessness, employment difficulties, financial difficulties, problems with the law, psychological distress, and barriers to attainment of higher education (Courtney et al., 2001). Pecora et al. (2006) found that one in five former foster youth were homeless at least one or more nights after leaving care. Another study with a sample of Wisconsin foster youth found that 14% of the males and 10% of the females were homeless (i.e., living on the street or in a shelter) at least once since discharge from the foster care system (Courtney et al., 2001). In addition, Brandford and English (2004) found that 11% of the former foster youth who exited foster care for 12 months or more in the state of Washington were homeless in a sample of 19 to 20-year olds.

Statistics on former foster youths' finances are bleak as well. Less than half (46%) of the youth had at least $250 in savings when they left care (Courtney et al., 2001). Furthermore, youth aging out of foster care had low wage earnings. The average wages per year were less than $6,000, which is below the 1997 poverty level of $7,890 for a single individual (George et al., 2002). Similarly, Pecora et al. (2006) found that former foster youth had household incomes of at or below the poverty level, which is three times higher than the national poverty rate.

In Courtney el al.'s (2001) study, even if a youth did have a job while in foster care (81% of sample), the numbers of youth with a current job after leaving foster care decreased substantially (61% of sample). Pecora et al., (2006) also found that while 80.1% of former foster youth were eligible to work, it is considerably lower than the national average of 95% for people ages 20 to 34. Moreover, one in six former foster youth was receiving cash public assistance from the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) program or General Assistance at the time

of the study compared to the 3% national rate of U.S. households (Pecora et al., 2006). Dworksy (2005) found a similar rate of 16.6% in a study of former foster youth in Wisconsin. However, Casey Family Services (1999) found a rate of 26% in a long-term follow-up study.

Some former foster youth encounter problems with the law. Since leaving the foster care system, 18% of Wisconsin's former foster youth had been arrested at least once (Courtney et. al., 2001). With the stresses of aging out and previous traumas experienced by a former foster youth, it is inevitable that attention to mental health is needed. However, most former foster youth do not receive adequate services after leaving foster care. While in foster care, 47% of Wisconsin's youth received mental health care services (Courtney et al., 2001). After leaving the foster care system, only 21% of Wisconsin's youth reported receiving mental health services (Courtney et al., 2001). Moreover, Pecora et al. (2006) found that 33% of the former foster youth did not have health insurance as compared to 18% of the general population for those in the 18- to 44-year old age group.

Education Experiences in Foster Care

With regard to barriers in attainment of higher education, many former foster youth experienced a range of problems during foster care that prevented them from obtaining higher education later in life. Since a child's safety and permanency are considered to be the priority while in the foster care system, academic achievement is often overlooked. The foster care system's focus when a child enters their care is to work on reunification with the biological family or consider other placement options. The child's education is often overlooked. Since academic achievement is not a priority, foster youth tend to experience more problems in school than their peers. Research has shown that foster children are more likely than their peers to drop

out of school before the 12th grade and experience academic and behavioral problems in schools (Altshuler, 2003; Smithgall et al., 2004; Yu, Day, & Williams, 2002). A large number of foster children score 15-20% lower on statewide standardized achievement tests in reading and mathematics than their peers (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003). In yet another study, it was found that foster youth in group homes had twice the rates of absenteeism, disciplinary referrals, and remaining in the same grade for an extra year compared to their non-foster care peers (Parrish et al., 2002). Some of the behavioral problems presented in school range from aggressive, demanding, immature and attention-seeking behaviors to withdrawn, anxious, and over-compliant behaviors (Kupinsel & Dubsky, 1999). Because of the myriad of problems exhibited in foster children, many children and youth from foster care are evaluated for and placed in special education programs. Foster children are overrepresented in special education. A range of 30% to 50% of children in foster care are placed in special education programs due to a learning disability or emotional problem compared to 12% of the general population (Hunt & Marshall, 2002).

Although a large number of foster children and youth are placed into special education, the needs of this population are often ignored or ineffectively addressed within the educational system. For example, out of the 39% of children in Oregon's foster care system who had an Individual Education Plan (IEP), only 16% received services (White et al., 1990). Interviews with foster parents from New York showed that 90% had no involvement in the special education process (Advocates for Children of New York, 2000). Interviews with social workers showed that there was an underestimation of foster children on their caseload with special education needs (George et al., 1992). Furthermore, Aldgate et al., 1993) found that caseworkers listed education as a priority only 2% of the time.

Other problems faced by foster youth are placement instability and the constant transferring of schools. The foster care system often forces a child to move from placement to placement. The average number of placements for Wisconsin's foster youth was 4.6 out-of-home care settings (i.e., foster homes, group homes, residential treatment centers, and kinship foster homes) with an average of 5.5 years spent in care (Courtney et al., 2004). In another study, Courtney et al. (2001) found that almost 50% of the sample members reported that they changed schools at least four times since starting their formal education. During the many transitions to various out-of-home placements, records of credits completed and the academic levels of the foster child is lost. A foster child may not have formally withdrawn from a school when transferred to another placement, and therefore failing grades will be reported on the student's records. Zetlin et al. (2006) found that there is no accountability for the educational success of a foster child. The social worker looks at the educational system as being responsible while the teacher looks at the child welfare system as being accountable. Yet another issue that comes up is the role and responsibility of the biological parent(s). In some cases, the parental rights are terminated, meaning the parents have no say in the youth's educational path. In other instances, the parents may still have rights. Then, there is the debate on who is responsible for the youth's education, the biological parents or the current caregivers of the foster child. The confusion about who has the authority over a youth's educational progress can interfere with the progress.

A consistent system of tracking a foster youth's academic progress is not available. Blome (1997) found that the adults in the lives of foster care youth were less likely to monitor homework than were biological parents. Other than problems caused by placement instability, the education offered to foster youth is often inadequate. Many foster youth are placed in schools that are non-public special education schools or alternative school programs. For foster youth

living in group homes, this is more often the case than for foster youth in other living arrangements (Zetlin el. al., 2004). The many problems associated with these special schools are low level of academics, difficulty accumulating credits, mixed age grouping with other students, lack of extracurricular activities, and a lack of physical education classes (Zetlin et al., 2006). There is also a lack credentialed teachers and these schools also do not offer college preparatory courses to prepare foster youth for higher education. Even when college preparatory classes are offered, only 45% of foster youth compared to 54% of non-foster youth enrolled in such courses (Blome, 1997). Due to placement instability, inadequate education, and the lack of someone to monitor a foster youth's academic strengths and weaknesses along with educational advocacy and mentoring, most foster youth fall through the cracks of both the foster care and education systems.

Higher Education

Despite the educational disruptions of foster youth, some do graduate from high school and go on to obtain higher education. In the Northwest Alumni Study, 84.8% former foster youth in the sample completed high school, which is comparable to the general population rate of 87.3% (see U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a, p.1) for people ages 18 to 29 (Pecora et al., 2006). Contrary to this finding, Zetlin et al. (2004) found that foster youth were twice as likely to leave school without a high school diploma than non-foster youth. In a longitudinal study, Blome (1997) found that in 1986, 77% of former foster youth had graduated from high school or completed their GED versus 93% of a matched group of same age youth. The differences of rates may be attributed to the fact that former foster youth in the Northwest Alumni Study had only been placed in family foster care settings. However, 65% of the former foster youth in the

Northwest Alumni Study had seven or more placements from elementary to high school. Pecora et al. (2006) did however mention that these placements might include placements prior to entering the foster care system and discharge from the foster care system. It is possible that protective factors such as participating in fun activities with foster family (76.1%) and having resources such as a driver's license (33.3%), cash (38.4%), and/or dishes and utensils (23.7%) when exiting care played a role for the higher high school graduation rate of former foster youth in the Northwest Alumni Study. It should be noted also that of the 87.3% with a high school education, 28.5% of these former foster youth received a GED compared to only 5% (National Center on Education Statistics, 2003) of the general population (Pecora et al., 2006). Although having a GED is better than not finishing a high school level education (Smith, 2003), people with high school diplomas are more successful as adults than those who have a GED. For example, Bozick and Deluca (2005) found that GED graduates were half as likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution than high school graduates. GED graduates also have lower incomes than those with high school diplomas (Grubb, 1999).

For those who manage to complete their high school education, some go on to higher education, but very few complete their studies. Studies show a range of college attendance rates. In Courtney, Piliavin, and Gorgan-Kaylor's study (1998), 9% of former foster youth had entered college. In another study, 39% of former foster youth had attended college (Festinger, 1983). An even higher rate of college attendance was found in Wedeven, et al's study (1997), where 57% of former foster youth had entered college. In the Northwest Alumni Study (2006), about 42.7% of the sample had some postsecondary education past high school. However, many former foster youth do not graduate from college after being enrolled. About 20.6% completed a degree or certificate beyond high school, and only 1.8% completed a bachelor's or higher degree (Pecora et

al., 2006). In Fastener's study (1983), of the 39% of students who did attend college, only 5% obtained a college degree or another higher degree. In Berth's study (1990), only 2% completed college out of 33% of the sample that did attend college. The differences in percentages found on outcomes of former foster youth in higher education can be attributed to many factors such as study design, sample size, foster care experience of former foster youth, etc. Although a national study of former foster youth in higher education has yet to be conducted in regards to the education experiences and outcomes of this population, the current literature sheds light on the overall outcomes of those who pursue higher education.

Role of Resiliency

For the small percentage of former foster youth who go on to higher education, resilience seems to be a significant contribution for success in higher education. Resilience is defined as "a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development" (Masten, 2001, p. 228). Some research suggests that children who experienced maltreatment and its accompanying stressors (i.e. removal from and/or loss of parents, transferring to many schools, poverty, stigma of being in foster care, and lack of contact with biological family) are more prone to developmental difficulties during the period of transition into adulthood (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1997; Cicchetti et. al., 1993). Contrary to these findings, other research has found that maltreated youth do achieve adaptive functioning despite the adversity they faced (Cicchetti et. al., 1993; Conte & Schuerman, 1987; Kaufman & Zigler, 1987; McGloin & Wisdom, 2001). These earlier studies do not include the population of former foster youth. In fact, very little is known about this population other than the negative outcomes in the majority of former foster youth. For the small minority of former foster youth that does

succeed, there is not a lot of research. In response to this limitation, Hines, Merdinger, and Wyatt (2005) interviewed 14 former foster youth attending a 4-year university to explore factors related to their academic success.

It was found that factors at the individual, family, and community levels and encompassing more than one system at a time were important in understanding resilience of these former foster youth (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005). At the individual level, participants possess several protective factors such as intelligence, a steady disposition, an optimistic and resourceful personality type, patience, and the ability to delay gratification (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005) that mirror findings from previous research on resilience of maltreated children (Cicchetti et al., 2005). Some additional protective factors at the individual level that are unique to this population are: being assertive in protecting themselves both within their abusive family and the foster care system; taking responsibility for their schooling, placements, and further education; utilizing help from others as a tool for survival; wanting to be different than their abusive families; and achieving in school to prevent negative expectations from being in the foster care system (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005).

Family-related protective factors include the involvement of foster parents, social workers, counselors, friends, and significant others in the lives of participants. This finding corroborates previous research that suggests the ability to establish a healthy relationship with a nonabusive adult is essential for promoting resilience in maltreated children (Egeland, Jacobvitz, & Sroufe, 1988; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992). Osterling and Hines' (2006) research also shows that the presence of mentors in the lives of older adolescent foster youth may help prevent negative outcomes as young people leave the foster care system.

For community-related protective factors, both the educational system and foster care system played a role in the success of these former foster youth. For all participants, school was a positive alternative to their troubled lives (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005), which is similar to research done by Lynch and Cicchetti (1992) that suggests involvement in school for maltreated children may provide developmental competence. Most of the former foster youth in higher education had been enrolled in gifted and talented programs and taken college-prep classes before enrolling into a post-secondary institution. The foster care system was beneficial to these former foster youth as it provided opportunities for education, positive relationships with adults, and friendships with peers (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005).

Although most of the former foster youth who achieved success academically had protective factors, all of them still struggled with psychological functioning and emotional health (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005). Some of the common themes in the struggle with mental health were achieving balance in life; feelings of stress, anxiety, and pressure related to school, finances, housing, and career; experiences of depression or sadness about missing out in childhood and also in college; and a continuing lack of connection to participants' past and to family of origin (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005). Similarly, Merdinger et al.'s (2005) study (the quantitative data in the Pathways to College study) found that former foster youth have difficulties with finances, accessing health insurance and services, and psychological distress. In Merdinger et al.'s (2005) study, an alarming 45% of former foster youth was found to not have any health insurance. Furthermore, only 35% of former foster youth have received some type of mental health services since leaving the foster care system (Merdinger et. al., 2005). These findings are evidence that former foster youth are in need of more support services after emancipation from the foster care system.

Although Merdinger et al. (2005) found some negative outcomes of former foster youth currently enrolled in a 4-year post-secondary institution, participants overall had characteristics that reflect resiliency. Over 80% of former foster youth had completed high school or some amount of college at the time of emancipation and over half had attended a community college before a 4-year university (Merdinger et al., 2005). More than half of the sample consisted of juniors and seniors, which indicates that they were able to stay in college and overcome the first, perhaps more difficult years (Merdinger et al., 2005).

Current Research

The current study builds upon Merdinger et al (2005) and Hines, Merdinger, and Wyatt's (2005) studies. There are several questions not addressed by the previous research that are worth exploring. Given the sample drawn in the present study, there are several important and unique elements of the current work.

One unique element of the current work is the inclusion of students who have graduated and students from non-traditional postsecondary institutions. Including these students in the current study will give us a better understanding of what factors are pertinent to those who graduate from their post-secondary institutions and what factors may hinder a former foster youth from graduating. Looking at the success of former foster youth will help us better understand and identify the supports and resources needed for those in higher education. For the current study, students who are enrolled in other non-traditional postsecondary institutions such as community/technical colleges and vocational colleges will also be included. It is important to include this group of students in order to identify the similarities and differences in resiliency characteristics and outcomes of both groups. Lastly, students who have dropped out, taken a

leave of absence, or withdrew within a year will be included. The purpose of including students who are not currently in school is to identify the barriers they faced and what resources are needed in order for them to complete their higher education goals.

A second unique element of the current work is the possible differences of protective factors and outcomes after emancipation from the foster care system between underclassmen (freshman and sophomores) and students with higher academic standings (i.e., juniors, seniors, students who have graduated, and graduate students). All former foster youth in college have achieved some level of success, but the ones with seniority in academic status may be able to provide a good picture of the factors that accompany success with higher education. Since the majority of the resilient former foster youth in Merdinger et al.'s (2005) sample are upperclassmen, it can be suggested that this group of students is more resilient than their peers with lower academic standings who are just starting college. For instance, students with higher academic standing may know how to better access resources and work with professors. They've been through the postsecondary institution's system already and are more experienced on how to achieve success in higher education. The purpose of addressing this limitation is to better understand what factors are helpful in achieving higher education. Understanding what the students with lower academic standings need in order to succeed will provide insight into better program service delivery for former foster youth pursuing higher education.

The entire sample completed a survey identical to Merdinger et al.'s (2005) survey in the 2007 fall semester of the academic year (Study I). Study 1 is set apart from Merdinger et al.'s (2005) research because the current study includes a national pool of participants versus Merdinger et al's (2005) sample of participants from only one state. Furthermore, the current study included students with educational backgrounds (i.e. students who graduated with

Associates and Bachelors degrees and students from 2-year community/technical colleges) different from Merdinger et al.'s (2005) sample, which only included students who were attending a 4-year state university. The main purpose of Study 1 was to focus on the resiliency characteristics of underclassmen and students with higher academic standings.

A subset of the Study 1 sample participated in in-depth follow-up interviews the following 2008 spring semester (Study 2). Study 2 aimed to better understand the barriers faced by former foster youth in higher education. Since previous research indicates that foster youth face many obstacles in education early, those who do go on to higher education already possess some level of resiliency. Are there specific protective factors lacking for former foster youth who enter but then leave their postsecondary institution? As seen in Merdinger et al. (2005) and Hines, Merdinger, and Wyatt's (2005) studies, some of these barriers may be due to finances, lack of mental health support, etc. Addressing these limitations will provide a more thorough understanding of how resiliency is related to the academic achievement of former foster youth and what support services this population needs in order to achieve academic success.

Study 1

Method

Participants

Participants were initially recruited through Ramsey and Hennepin counties' Education Training Voucher (ETV) programs in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. The ETV program is a scholarship program for former foster youth. Any former foster youth who have aged out of Minnesota's foster care system at age 18 or upon graduation from high school, under 21 years old at the time of the application, and currently attending a postsecondary education program are eligible for this ETV program.

Recruitment of participants was later expanded to include students nationwide through the assistance of FosterClub, The National Network for Youth in Foster Care (a network of current foster youth, foster care alumni and allies) and the Orphan Foundation of America (a national scholarship program for foster care alumni and orphans). Current and past interns from the FosterClub All-Star program were recruited by email. All the interns have had foster care experience. OFA scholarship recipients were also recruited by email through the scholarship director. The requirements for the OFA scholarship are similar to the ETV programs. OFA scholarship recipients must be in one of the three following conditions: 1) have been in foster care for one consecutive year at the time of their 18th birthday or high school graduation, 2) have been adopted or taken into legal guardianship out of foster care after their 16th birthday, or 3) have lost both parents to death before the age of 18 and not been subsequently adopted. In addition, they must be under the age of 25 when they first apply for the OFA scholarship. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Participants were assigned with a subject code number and access to their information was only available to the researcher and research advisor to ensure confidentiality.

Measures and Procedures

A self-administered questionnaire was given to participants during Fall 2007. The questions from this self-administered questionnaire are drawn from previous studies done on the population of young people in the foster care system. The survey includes questions related to participants' foster care experiences, transitions experiences, and their current higher education experiences *(See Appendix A)*. The self-administered questionnaire was available both online through Survey Monkey and in pencil-paper format. The majority of participants opted to take

the self-administered questionnaire online. It took approximately 30 minutes to complete the self-administered questionnaire. This survey instrument has been used by researchers who study the educational experiences of former foster youth (Merdinger et al., 2005) and is considered to be a valid measure of the outcomes and experiences of former foster youth. Participants who completed the self-administered questionnaire online had to read the consent form and click "yes" to "I agree to participate in Phase I of the study." before they could proceed to the study. Participants who completed the self-administered questionnaire in pencil-and-paper signed a consent form before beginning the survey. Participants included their contact information on the consent form in order to receive their compensation of a $5 gift card to Target. In addition, participants' contact information was used for Phase II recruitment and delivery of the results of the study by email. After completion of the survey, participants were prompted to a screen with the debriefing form, which provided participants with information about the study and contact information of social workers, the researcher, and the research advisor in the event that they may need to be referred to mental health counseling. For participants who completed the self-administered questionnaire in pencil-and-paper format, the debriefing form was signed and given to the research. The researcher was present when participants completed the self-administered questionnaire in pencil-and-paper format. A debriefing form was signed immediately after completion of the self-administered questionnaire and collected by the researcher.

Data Collection

After approval from Macalester College's Institutional Review Board, the self-administered questionnaire was available to participants. Participants were notified by email or in-person by the researcher to participate in the study. Participants from Hennepin County

voluntarily completed the survey during a required meeting for first-year ETV recipients, in which the researcher was present to answer questions. When the study expanded nationally, FosterClub and Orphan Foundation of American provided contact information of eligible participants. Emails were sent out to current OFA scholarship recipients and current and past interns from FosterClub. A total of 150 surveys were completed. Ten participants did not qualify for the study due to missing information regarding their academic standing, resulting in a final sample size of 140.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to provide characteristics of participants in the following areas: demographics, educational history, current educational experiences, resources, including financial support, social support and health status, problems including mental health, substance abuse and delinquency, history in out-of-home care and preparation for independent living, and overall life satisfaction and hopefulness for the future. Data were divided into two samples. Sample 1 includes underclassmen (N=68) and sample 2 includes upperclassmen (N=72). For the purposes of Phase I, the term "underclassmen" includes students with freshman and sophomore academic standing. The term "upperclassmen" includes juniors, seniors, graduates with associates and bachelor's degrees, and graduate students. Independent t-tests and chi-squares were also performed on selected questions.

Results

Descriptive statistics regarding demographic information; history in out-of-home care, educational history; current educational experiences; health, mental health, substance abuse, and delinquency; financial resources and social support; and life satisfaction are presented below. Independent t-tests were performed on social supports, types of placements while in care,

barriers to obtaining needed services at the universities, having someone to borrow money from, and problems with the law. Chi-squares were performed on how well the foster care system prepared youth for higher education and the current financial situation of youth. Inferential statistics will only be included in places where a statistically significant difference was found between the under- and upperclassmen.

Table 1 provides the demographic information of the underclassmen and upperclassmen. The majority of both samples were female (76.5% and 91.7%, respectively). White or Caucasian (44.1% and 40.3%) people made up the largest racial group in both samples. Most students were single or never had been married (80.9% and 66.7%). Only 7.4% had children in the underclassmen sample, while 25.0% of the upperclass students had children. The mean current age was 20.22 for underclassmen and 22.61 for upperclassmen.

Table 2 includes the history in out-of-home care and preparation for independent living. The majority of both underclassmen and upperclassmen spent some time in non-relative foster homes (80.9% and 77.8%, respectively) and was enrolled in an independent living skills program (76.5% and 68.1%, respectively). Most felt somewhat prepared for independent living while emancipated. An independent t-test was performed on the types of placements for both classes. For the group home placement, there was a trend approaching significance, $t(138) = 1.89$, $p = 0.06$). Upperclassmen tended to have more group home placements than underclassmen.

Table 3 describes the educational history of both classes. Most of the students from both groups had at least completed high school (58.8% and 45.5%, respectively). Most of the underclassmen and upperclassmen students indicated the following activities and experiences in high school: extracurricular activities (77.9% and 70.8%), college preparedness (52.9% and

56.9%), advising about college (50.0% and 47.2%), and information about financial aid (57.4% and 48.6%). Both groups took about 4 years to complete high school or GED. The majority of both groups indicated information about financial aid (67.6% and 61.1%) and advising about college (54.4% and 50.0%) as important in their decision to go to college. Both groups began college at an average age of 18 years.

Table 4 includes information about the current education experiences of students. 22.1% of the underclassmen were transfer students while 47.2% of the upperclassmen were transfer students. Most of the students lived off-campus. Of those who lived off-campus, most of the underclassmen and upperclassmen rented apartments (33.3% and 41.7%). The majority of the underclassmen and upperclassmen's current degree objective were to obtain a bachelor's degree (58.8% and 79.2%). Most students from both groups mentioned a lack of time as a major barrier to obtaining services (42.6% and 54.2%). The majority of students from both groups felt the foster care system did not very well prepared them for college (51.5% and 65.3%).

Table 5 refers to the financial resources and social support. Students from both groups were supporting themselves mostly with financial aid (88.2% and 84.7%), employment (75.0% and 66.7%), and scholarships (73.5% and 81.9%). For those who worked, the average number of hours worked was 23.47 (underclassmen) and 29.01 (upperclassmen) hours. Most students from both groups had someone to borrow $200 from (58.8% and 45.5%). Underclassmen reported having current friends that include people they knew while in foster care more than the upperclassmen group, $t(137) = -2.38$, $p < .019$. For maintaining contact with foster, group, or kin-care parents, there was a trend approaching significance, $t(138) = -1.80$, $p<.074$). There was a higher rate of underclassmen maintaining contact with caregivers than the upperclassmen group.

Table 6 includes health, mental health, substance use problems and delinquency for both groups. The majority was covered with health insurance (70.6% and 73.6%). Since being discharged from foster care, the majority of students were sometimes unable to obtain medical care (57.4% and 61.1%). Most did not have problems with the law, drugs, alcohol, and substance abuse issues.

Table 7 describes the life satisfaction of underclassmen and upperclassmen. The majority of them felt somewhat happy with their lives these days overall (57.4% and 58.3%). As to how hopeful they feel about the future overall, the majority felt very hopeful (60.3% and 69.4%).

Discussion

Study 1 reflects the descriptive findings from the underclassmen and upperclassmen groups. The purpose of Study 1 was to better understand the characteristics, challenges, and outcomes of underclassmen compared to students with higher academic standings (the upperclassmen group). The original hypothesis was that students with higher academic standings will be more likely to possess resiliency characteristics than the underclassmen. For the most part, this hypothesis was not supported. The characteristics of both groups were very similar overall. Both groups have similar out-of-home care histories with an average of about 10 years old when first placed in foster care for underclassmen and 11 years old for upperclassmen. Both underclassmen and upperclassmen spent an average of approximately 7 years and an average of 6 placements while in foster care. These out-of-home care experiences are similar to Merdinger et al.'s (2005) study and other studies (Barth, 1990; Courtney et al., 2001; Courtney & Barth, 1996). However, results from Study 1 indicate that there is a trend approaching significance for former foster youth with group home placements. More upperclassmen had group home

placements (55.6%) than underclassmen (39.7%). This trend goes against the current hypothesis. Stability is considered a protective factor, and it can be argued that a group home placement does not provide that stability. Group homes are often characterized by high staff turnover rates and do not provide the basic family unit that is most favorable for development. Thus, the higher number of upperclassmen with group homes as a prior placement does not support the current hypothesis. However, it is important to note that the question asks participants *all* types of placements they've had while in out-of-home care. Although upperclassmen may have had more group home placements than underclassmen, it does not mean the majority of their out-of-home care experience was in a group home setting. It may simply be one of the many types of placements they've had. The current research does not indicate either underclassmen or upperclassmen as having more stability. The majority of both groups had placements in non-relative foster homes, which suggests that both groups may have established healthy relationships with a trusted adult, which is a family-related protective factor for promoting resilience (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2006).

Other than family-related protective factors, community-related factors also seem to play a role for students from both groups while they were in high school. Again, there was no statistically significant evidence in this category to support the current hypothesis. However, it should be noted that the results of Study 1 were very similar to the results of Merdinger et al. (2005). Study 1 results indicate that students did not enroll in too many schools while in out-of-home care. The average enrollment was 2 elementary schools, 1 middle school, and 2 high schools for both groups in Study 1, which is almost identical Merdinger et al. (2005)'s research. Enrollment in fewer schools provides further evidence that students are being provided with stability within their communities, which serves as another protective factor. Overall, results do

not show any major differences in the educational histories as well as the current educational experiences between the underclassmen and upperclassmen groups. Both groups had similar struggles while in college such as lack of time to obtaining services, not knowing where and how to obtain services, and having transportation problems. Both the underclassmen (51.5%) and the upperclassmen (65.3%) also felt that the foster care system did not prepare them very well for college. These results are similar to Merdinger et al.'s (2005) findings. More research is warranted in regards to what services are needed to combat these barriers former foster youth face in their quest to achieve success in higher education.

Similar to Merdinger et al. (2005), the results of Study 1 show that finances and social support are important indicators of success in educational achievement. Both groups seem to be doing equally well when it comes to the availability of financial resources, with the majority supporting themselves through financial aid, employment, and scholarships. However, both groups mostly described their financial situation as fair. Furthermore, only 58.8% of underclassmen and 45.8% of upperclassmen had someone to borrow $200 from. These numbers are substantially lower than Merdinger et al.'s (2005) study where 75.7% of the students had someone to borrow $200 from. These results suggest that although students may have had family-related protective factors earlier on, their outcomes are not very strong later on. Moreover, more underclassmen had friends they knew while in foster care (64.7%) than upperclassmen (45.8%). This result further points to the possibility that former foster youth lose the stability of healthy friendships with peers as a protective factor when they leave the foster care system. Furthermore, a trend approaching significance for maintaining contact with foster, group home, or kin-care parents illustrates this point. Underclassmen have maintained contact with foster, group home, or kin-care parents (76.5%) at a higher rate than upperclassmen

(62.5%). This result suggests that former foster youth do continue to lose connections they've made in foster care when they leave. Thus, they lose the stability that was formed earlier on that served as a protective factor. In other words, former foster youth do not achieve permanency, which is a "lifelong, kin-like relationship with a supportive adult" (FosterClub, 2006, p. 16).

Other than the obvious need for social support and permanency for former foster youth, another much needed resource is health insurance. In some states, insurance is offered until a former foster youth reaches the age of 21. In some others, they get cut off right away when they leave the system. It is not a surprise that underclassmen have a higher rate of being covered by state/government insurance (72.3%) than the upperclassmen (30.2%). They may be covered in the first two years of college, but when they reach 21, the numbers start dropping. Luckily, the majority of the upperclassmen are covered by health insurance (74.6%) even if it's not covered by the state. Most upperclassmen report being covered by private insurance (49.1%). For both groups, the majority felt very concerned if they did not have insurance (75% of underclassmen and 82.4% of upperclassmen). It is very obvious that full health insurance coverage by the state/government for former foster youth is much needed.

With regard to drug use and alcohol problems, there were few differences between the two groups. Generally, neither groups had current problem with drug use or drinking.
The findings on life satisfaction are similar for both groups and mirror findings from Merdinger et al's (2005) study. The majority of former foster youth from both groups felt somewhat happy about life at the present time and very hopeful of their futures. As indicated in the current results and in Merdinger et al.'s (2005) study, former foster youth have struggles with finances, with access to health insurance, and may experience some degree of poor psychological functioning. Given the majority of students from both groups support themselves with employment and work

an average of 23 and 29 hours respectively, both groups described their financial situation as fair. Since being discharged from foster care, 31.3% of underclassmen and 35.7% of upperclassmen have received mental health services, similar to Merdinger et al.'s (2005) study where 35.0% received mental health services. The data imply that although former foster youth may be currently struggling and only feeling somewhat happy about their lives, their optimistic and resourceful personality type (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005) allows them to be very hopeful about their futures and able to achieve success in their higher education goals. Despite possibly losing family-related and community protective factors, this group of former foster youth still possesses protective factors at the individual level.

Study 1 was successful in illuminating that former foster youth had more social supports upon leaving the foster care system but tend to lose the connections later on. We also know from the current study that both groups face similar barriers to higher education such as lack of health care insurance and sufficient financial resources. Details are lacking, however, about other forms of social supports. In the current study, social support questions from the survey questionnaire only pertained to social support in the form of finances. What about a place to go to for the holidays or summer break? Or what would happen if a student fallen ill and had no health insurance? To what extent does social support continue in a former foster youth's life as they make that transition to higher education and later on in life? Questions such as these were addressed in Study 2 in order to better understand the needs of former foster youth in higher education. Fourteen respondents from Study 1 participated in in-depth interviews about barriers to education prior to and during their postsecondary education. Some of the topics covered included but were not limited to: the availability of social support and permanency, health care options, work experiences while in school, financial resources, and community belonging. Better

understanding of these needs will lead to improved efforts in program delivery and services as well as offering policy changes that may affect the lives of former foster youth in higher education.

Study 2

Method

Participants

Fourteen participants were recruited from Study 1. These participants were affiliated with Minnesota's Hennepin County ETV program, Orphan Foundation of America, and/or FosterClub: The National Network for Youth in Foster Care. Participants in Study 2 were recruited from Study 1.

Measures and Procedures

Interview questions (*see Appendix B)* were formulated based on past research (Merdinger et al., 2005; Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005) and results of Study 1. Interview questions were related to issues pertinent to former foster youth in higher education such as health care, permanency and social support, preparation for higher education while in foster care. Participants were recruited either through a direct phone call or email. The in-depth interviews took place during Spring 2008. The interviews took place over the telephone, and the interviews were audio taped. Each interview lasted approximately 35 to 60 minutes. Participants were emailed a consent form prior to beginning the interview. Each participant provided a verbal consent (which was recorded) that they read and understood the consent form sent to them. After completion of the interview, participants were provided with a debriefing over the phone. They were also sent a debriefing from over email, which provided contact information of the research and the research

adviser for any questions, comments, or concerns they may have. Participants were provided with a $10 gift card to their choice of Target or Wal-Mart, which was mailed out to the addresses they provided.

Data Analysis

Coding of interviews included common themes that emerged in the transcripts and past research. Some of the main themes examined were permanency (a lifelong, kin-like relationship with a supportive adult) and mentors, a sense of community or belonging, work situations, health care, and availability of financial resources. The primary researcher and research assistant coded three transcripts separately. After a consensus was achieved and accuracy was ensured, the remainder of the transcripts was coded by the researcher.

Results

Characteristics of Sample

Ten females and four males participated in Study 2. Eleven students were still in school and three were currently taking a leave of absence or had dropped out of school. The racial categories participants identified as belonging to are: African American (7), White or Caucasian (5), or Asian American (2). The mean age of this sample was 21 years old, with a range of 19 to 26. The academic standings of the participants were freshman (4), sophomores (3), juniors (3), and seniors (4). For those who were not currently in school, the academic standings represent their status when they most recently attended their postsecondary institution and they left their postsecondary institutions 1 to 3 semesters ago. Five of the participants are or were attending community colleges, six attended public colleges or universities, and the remaining three attended private colleges or universities.

Permanency and Mentors

All of the participants indicated that they had at least one permanent adult figure in their lives. The identification of permanent adult figures for this group included biological parents, foster parents, professors, teachers, mentors, and social workers. The permanent adult figures were grouped into two categories: parental and professional. A permanent-parental relationship was more personal while the permanent-professional relationship was more of a mentor-type relationship. Most participants had mentioned both parental and professional permanent adult figures in their lives at the time of the interview. An example of a permanent-parental adult figure came from this particular former foster youth:

> *My foster mom, she's always the one I can fall back on. She's always there to talk to me, to encourage me; she basically helps me in any way that I may need possible. I don't know. I mean my father will also help me in any way he can. I don't talk to him that much on a personal level but he's there when I need to talk about stuff. I generally shift towards my foster mother. I would say she's probably the most permanent figure and when I mean support, I mean if it's financially if she can, if I needed it, or just someone to talk to. Or when I go back to Seattle. I know that's where I'm staying for the duration of my visit, things like that. And you she went to college, so she has a lot of advice for me. I talk to her almost pretty much every other day.*
>
> *(Female, 22, Senior, Private, In School)*

One former foster youth who had a permanent-professional adult figure describes her experience:

> *I think my therapist has been a great help because every time I have problems, I talk to her and she tells me just do what's best for you and...like if you want back to school, you can. Nothing is really stopping me, you know. So it's not like there's no one supporting me and trying to help me...well in the summertime I was thinking of going back to school, and I asked her some questions. She gives me some answers she knew so that was kind of helpful.*
>
> *(Female, 20, sophomore, Community, Not in School)*

Another example of a permanent-professional relationship is mentioned from another former foster youth:

Yeah I actually have a couple. In high school, I realized that I wanted to have a professional career. I started seeking adult figures. In my hometown there were programs called YWCA, Women's Horizons...When I was in the program, they hook up... was a woman who has a professional job...basically became my mentor. She was a surgical nurse. Basically she just spent time with me. She maybe exposed me to her career once or twice. But it's basically having the idea of having somebody to encourage you to do well in high school, and encourage you, and motivate you to do stuff so that you can somewhat of a professional life as what she has. So I started that when I was in 5th grade, we've been hanging out with each other. Up till now, we're still friends. She basically takes me out to...we basically do stuff that I would not normally do. Because being poor, you don't have that much money and you don't have that much opportunities. She was one of the adult figures.

(Female, 23, Senior, Public, In School)

Moreover, some defined a permanent adult figure as someone they keep in contact with over the phone or see once in a while. The same former foster youth mentioned:

Yeah I maintained contact with them. It's really nice...I still initiate the conversation. It's important to have the network...when you're at a job, you never know if you need to go back to that hometown and they may know somebody else. I think part of my reason was to develop friendship with them but also to develop a network of people. I think that's very important, in regards to advancing in life and also just to make it through life. I still maintain, I call them...I try to send email and try to call them sometime. It's still comfortable when I talk to them, it's not like I feel uncomfortable. We're still friends.

(Female, 23, Senior, Public, In School)

Community Belonging

As to having a sense of community or belonging in the past, four participants from the sample indicated that they do feel that they belonged (28.6%) , seven participants did not feel like they belonged (50.0%), and three participants said yes and no (21.4%). Those who had a strong sense of community or belonging in their postsecondary institution tended to be involved in extracurricular activities at their school or involved in their community. A former foster youth talks about his sense of community or belonging at his new school:

Well I just love my school, I love my classes, I had a very positive first semester. I got more involved, that definitely kept me here and wanting to find out more about the college...In the fall semester, I got involved in the QSA at my school, it's the Queer

Straight Alliance. I got involved in a fraternity, that's definitely a big thing. I've been doing those things. I took on some leadership things in my fraternity. I'm definitely very involved in that. I just did an interview for Orientation Assistant, which is basically when all the new students come. It's like a week of orientation, you set up events and help them out and like help them transition. I had an interview for that last night, my second interview...that's definitely something I want to do. I mean it makes it so easy just to say because there's nothing really hard about being here. Obviously the work is a lot more than high school. Other than that, there's nothing negative I can say about this place. And the weather is really nice too....Also I made a lot of good friends, a lot of close relationships with my professors, that also kept me going because people contribute to how your college experience. All the people are just so nice and they're so welcoming so that help me to keep positive and keep wanting to come back and be a part of it.

(Male, 19, Private, In School)

Those who do not feel a sense of community or belonging tended to keep to themselves and sometimes feel isolated. One former foster youth said,

No...I'm just not really a people's person. I just haven't grown out of that shell yet so I don't like being around other people. So right now the only organization that I'm in is like I said Living Learners. I'm like one of the staff's assistant in the Living Learners committee...As a freshman, it's kind of hard to settle down..I just haven't had time for it. Maybe sophomore year will be different.

(Male, 19, Freshman, Public, In School)

Some people felt a sense of community or belonging because they felt like they fit the description or category of being in the postsecondary institution. However, as far as being involved or having some type of social life, they did not feel that is a part of their lives.

Yes, and no...like I said before it's not a regular college, it's a maritime college, it's like ah New York State of Maritime College...kind of like a military school, kind of like a military academy, I feel like I belong to the institution and all that stuff but it's if you say if I belong to a small group, I don't feel like I belong to a small group, I feel like I'm part of something big... yes in the sense that you're part of the like...the whole system, and how the regiment works activities and all that stuff and I say no because when you say community I thought when we go outside of the school and do like some kind of community service and we don't...like you know we basically in the school, it's not like we are like regular college kids just go out to community...you know I don't know do some kind of volunteer work we don't do that... so in that sense I don't think I feel like a real part of the community

(Male, 24, Senior, Public, In School)

Work

Thirteen of the participants from the sample were working while attending school (92.9%). Out of the participants who worked, eight of them indicated that work had a positive and negative influence on their academics (61.5%). The positive influences included: better time management, a source of income, motivation for something better in the future, and development of skills for future employment. The negative influence mostly had to do with not having enough time to fully focus on their academics. Three out of the 13 participants who worked indicated that it had only positively affected their academics (23.1%), and one indicated that it has negatively affected their academics (7.7%). One person out of the 13 participants had recently started her job and did not indicate that working affected her academics either way (7.7%). The one person who did not currently work indicated that it was a positive influence on her academics (7.1%).

One former foster youth explained how work can be both a barrier and a protective factor at the same time.

> *I work full-time as a waitress at a seafood restaurant, which is a block away from my house. And then I work part-time as a dance instructor. It's negatively affected my academics because it's like a catch 22 like I can't pay my rent to go to school unless I'm working. And I can't go to work when I go to school sometimes to make the money to pay my rents. It's kind of negative because it takes away time I could be focusing on school work and projects and studying. It's just negative because I could do so much more with school if I didn't have to work all the time. I guess it's positively affected it because my mangers are pretty accommodating to my schedule. So usually if I tell them, "Hey, I have to be at school Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays," they won't schedule me those days. It's positive in that respect but it's also negative for the most part because it takes away time I could be improving my life through school. In working as a waitress...you have to work with the public, you have to work with people, so it kind of helps me in school, you know getting to know people for study sessions because I know how to talk to people from working as a waitress.*
>
> *(Female, 24, Sophomore, Community, In School)*

Another former foster youth also indicated that working while in school has been a positive and negative experience. However, this student was not currently in school when the interview took place.

> *...Negatively it took away from me going to school and took my focus on my education because I was worried about work, and..., and money and things like that. I was not able to give the attention to my education...The time that I should be studying, I'll be at work. When I go to work, I bring my homework and stuff to work to study during my work, not giving my full attention to my homework and things like that. It was kind of a small setback...If I was to be looking at negative setbacks or negative categories, you cannot completely devote to school. Positively I'll be more aware that I'm not going to have to work as hard and that I could make money as well as go to school and not spend all my energy. It was the type of job I did have, I was a waitress so it was so much on me to you know when I was at work and the area that I was in, it was right by the school, it was convenient but it wasn't the best way for me to earn my money and save up because of the high demands and the stress level that it kept on you. But when I go back to school, I'll have a different job as a bank teller. So it's like more relaxing and not as stressful.*
>
> *(Female, 21, Sophomore, Public, Not in School)*

Health Care

Eight participants from the sample had health insurance (57.1%) and five did not have health insurance (35.7%). One did person did not answer the question (7.1%). Of those participants who had health insurance at the time of the interview, five of them had concerns either currently or previously about the availability and cost of health care insurance options. They also had concerns over health care options (i.e. availability of clinics, mental health services). Three of the participants who had insurance at the time of the interview did not indicate any concerns either currently or in the past (37.5%). Of the five who did not have health care insurance at the time of the interview, all of them had concerns. Overall, with or without insurance at the time of the interview, 10 participants out of the entire sample had concerns about health insurance either at the present time or in their past experiences as a former foster youth (71.4%).

One example of a former foster youth with health care insurance currently indicated problems in the past:

> *When I left foster care, I had Medi-Cal and I had a 2-year old daughter. I was 18 with a 2-year old daughter. I left with Medi-Cal but I moved to a different county and was not aware that the Medi-Cal did not transfer. Trying to apply for Medi-Cal with a 2-year old daughter not knowing how to do that was extremely difficult. We went months without insurance, I think 6 months I believe without it. Because I did not have all the paperwork that I needed, you know, bank statements, birth certificates, because when you're in a group home, they don't give you that stuff. You're pretty much on your own to find the birth certificates, your social security cards, medical records so we did not have health insurance for a very, very long time... I had to reapply and then I moved after I got it and I had to move back to Orange County because I got married. And then I had to reapply again, but because I was married, I was no longer covered under Medi-Cal, so I went without insurance. And my daughter received Medi-Cal but I had to take another 3 months to get her on it because that's how long it took for me to establish a bank account, get all my records...*
>
> (Female, 26, Junior, Public, In School)

Another former foster youth without health care insurance currently talks about her negative experience.

> *Well that's the worst part actually. At 21, I was sent a letter in the mail saying that I would no longer have medical insurance. As of 21, I have not had medical insurance. I have been sick for example, for the past week with strep throat. I can't go to the doctor because I don't have insurance and I don't have the money to go to an urgent care clinic. I have no medical insurance. For the typical kid that does not grow up in foster care, you can get insurance through your parents' work until you're 24. And for foster kids, you're out of the Medi-Cal system at 21. That 's 3 years where you could have medical and so when I'm sick, I can't go the doctor and I'm screwed. I got to go to work. I got to go to school. I can't miss it. I can't miss school because I'll flunk out. I can't miss work because I won't be able to pay for rent to go to school. So medical insurance is a big big issue for former foster youth....I don't have any because I'm 24 and I need them bad. I need to go back to mental health. I'm bipolar. I need to go to the dentist. I haven't had a check-up since I was 21. I need these things and they are not available for me. For Medi-Cal, basically because I have a job, I can't get Medi-Cal. They think I make too much but I don't make enough to pay $150 a month for personal insurance. So I'm stuck right in the middle...Honestly, to answer that, it's gonna be very short, I have no medical options at this point.*
>
> *(Female, 24, Sophomore, Community, In School)*

Financial Resources

All of the participants indicated receiving some type of financial aid (in the form of scholarships, grants, and/or loans) to assist them with paying for their higher education while they were in school. A few students mentioned that information about financial aid was an important asset for going on to higher education. It also should be noted that financial problems continued to exist for many of the students who were pursuing higher education. One former foster youth talks about her experience of juggling school and work to meet the basic needs of survival for her children and herself.

> *It positively affects because that's how I can afford school. It negatively affects because I feel like it's one of the reasons why it's taking me so long to get my degree. But I don't have the financial support of like anyone so it's very difficult to um you know sometimes you're tired, you worked all day, after two children, getting them dinner and getting them ready them adjusted and THEN after all that and I'm exhausted and tired and I really want to get to bed, I just have other stuff I want to do so. I think that is another reason why education takes the back burner sometimes...Sometimes I don't want to be a student. Sometimes I want to take that time off, because it's the one chance that I feel like I can negotiate. The others are NOT. They're not negotiable so that's the reason why education often times gets postponed and delayed because you know if you're worrying about I have to eat as opposed to I have to get my bachelor's degree it's kind of like hmm...that's pretty much how it works, I mean...Yeah just not being able to have that full time to focus, you know what I mean, to have that undivided attention is a good way of describing it. I don't have the luxury of having that and doing my first priority.*
>
> *(Female, 26, Junior, Public, In School)*

Discussion

The purpose of Study 2 was to better understand the barriers former foster youth face during their various pathways to achieving success in higher education. Since there are high college drop-out rates for former foster youth (Pecora et al., 2006; Barth, 1993), it is important to understand what former foster youth need in order to achieve their higher education goals. Another goal of Study 2 was to identify former foster youth's perspectives on policy recommendations to better meet their needs. The policy recommendations provided came from

the interview data, which is a highlight of the current research. Most of the previous research on education of current and former foster youth include policy recommendations from the researchers and other professionals.

In terms of permanency and mentors, results indicate that all youth have some personal connection with a supportive adult. The current results mirror Hines, Merdinger, and Wyatt's (2005) study that having a relationship with a trustworthy adult serves as a protective factor. However, it should be noted that some former foster youth described their relationship with their "permanent" adult figures as more of a professional relationship than a personal-parental type relationship. Although having a permanent-professional relationship definitely has its values as far as guidance and mentoring for academic success, former foster youth may still lack stability in their lives. Being able to talk to someone over the phone or email occasionally or seeing them "once in a while" does not equal permanency. Former foster youth with permanent-professional relationships appeared to have a false sense of permanency. Permanency is a lifelong, kin-like relationship with a supportive adult (FosterClub, 2006). It is not someone that you hang out with once in a while or simply provide you with tips for life. Permanency is having someone there when you need to go home for the holidays, having emotional support during trying times, etc. Participants with permanent-professional relationship did not indicate a lifelong connection with that type of supportive adult. For those who have permanent-parental relationships with their supportive adult figures, they tend to have a lifelong connection. Those with permanent-professional relationships tend to have short-term relationships that end when the program they participated ends. The current study did not indicate participants with a particular type of permanent relationship as having better outcomes in higher education. More research is needed to understand what permanency means to former foster youth. It is also important to distinguish

permanent-professional and permanent-parental to understand which is most helpful to former foster youth pursuing higher education. It is possible that both types of relationships have benefits for various aspects of meeting higher education goals. Participants from Study 2 made valuable recommendations for improving the foster care system. Some of the recommendations from former foster youth regarding mentors were:

1) Provide mentors for students until they reach their higher education goals. Do not set limits as to age or educational status.
2) Require social service agencies and social workers to provide information about expectations for college admissions, financial resources for former foster youth, and medical insurance options before they leave the foster care system.

Few of the former foster youth indicated that they had a feeling of involvement in the community or a sense of belonging in their post-secondary institution. Hines, Merdinger, and Wyatt (2005) indicated that most of the students in their sample had been involved in the community while in high school, which served as a protective factor. Some students mentioned not feeling a sense of community or belonging due to the fact that very few or none of the students on campus has that shared experience of being in foster care. That transition from foster care to adulthood can be very difficult for former foster youth throughout the college years. One former foster spoke about her identity as a former foster youth and the difficulty of relating to others without the foster care experience:

> *I feel like there aren't many people I can relate to as far as my foster care experience. I think my foster care experience took such, I don't want to use the word toll, but it comprised a lot of my teenage years. It's very difficult to separate that and not make that be a part of me because it is, you know what I mean so...One of the things I found to be difficult is that you after I've known someone for a while and I let them know about, oh yeah I was in foster care, they start asking questions like at holiday times and stuff like*

that and like, "Oh so yeah I'm going to see my family at x,y,z state or you know and then they'll ask me what you doing, and I'm like oh I'm staying here and it comes up and I say yeah I was in foster care. And I think often times people do not know how to deal with that. I get the sympathy card of like oh my god...or the oh what did you do to kind of be in foster care, that kind of thing. It's very difficult to kind of in a way not want to feel sorry for myself because I don't. I feel like when is the right time to let someone in on that experience, like I said, that is a huge part of who I am, you know what I mean.

(Female, 26, Junior, Private, In School)

Other reasons for not feeling a sense of community or belonging were due to personal traits. These people identified as loners. They did not have the desire to be involved in extracurricular activities, campus events, or the community in general. Because the present sample included only 14 students, one cannot conclude that most former foster youth have a hard time finding a sense of community or belonging in their postsecondary institution. The present data suggest, however, that those with a sense of community have a good sense of well-being. They are also able to approach professors, participate in study groups with peers, and advocate for themselves. These factors may play a role in their educational achievement.

Medical insurance proved to be a big concern for former foster youth. A large majority of them had problems with having a lack of medical insurance either in the past or in the present. Similar to the Merdinger et al. (2005) and Courtney et al. (2006) findings, the present study shows the medical needs of former foster youth are not met. At the present time, free medical insurance is available to former foster youth in a limited number of states. For those who do have access to medical insurance, the age limit is only up to 18 or 21. Former foster youth indicated that efforts need to be made to extend medical insurance for former foster youth in higher education and also those who are not in higher education. Many mentioned that lack of health care insurance proved to be a major barrier or setback in their higher education pathways. The

following recommendations in regards to medical insurance are provided from former foster youth:

1) Require the state to provide youth with all the necessary documents needed to apply for medical insurance when they leave care (i.e. birth certificate, social security card, identification card/driver's license)
2) Provide medical insurance up to age 25 or when a former foster youth finishes their undergraduate education.
3) Require states to help students apply for medical insurance before they leave the system and provide ongoing support for the application process as long as the former foster youth stays in school.
4) Make sure foster youth know their medical insurance options before they leave the foster care system.

With regard to work, most students indicated that work has been both a positive and negative experience for them. Overall, it was positive in the sense that they had an income; however, it was negative because they did not have enough time to fully focus on school. The theme that seemed to emerge was that they had to balance school and work. Without work, they did not have enough financial resources to go to school. With work, it provided a barrier or setback to their higher education goals. Work issues goes hand in hand with the lack of sufficient financial aid resources for this sample of former foster youth. These findings mirror Merdinger et al.'s (2005) findings where most students indicate their current financial situation as fair. Most former foster youth do not have the stability of asking their biological parents for extra money when they need it; they have to work to support themselves for school. Most students mentioned that work also positively affected their academics; most indicated that it was helpful for time

management. This is a very important skill to have for achieving success in higher education. To balance the positive and negatives of working to finance their education, the following are recommendations former foster youth have in regards to financial support:

1) Provide a program where former foster youth are eligible for free room and board. Provide either free meals in the school's cafeteria or a stipend for groceries.
2) For the Education Training Voucher program and other scholarships specifically for former foster youth, extend the eligibility up to age 30.
3) Require all states to provide the tuition waiver for wards of the state and former foster youth.

Limitations of the Current Research

The goal of Study 2 was to compare students currently in school and students currently not in school (i.e. dropped out, taken a leave of absence, or withdrew). Reaching former foster youth not currently in school proved to be very difficult. Therefore, Study 2 focused on identifying the barriers and needs of former foster youth overall. Participation of former foster youth not currently in school is much needed for future research. In order to lower the drop-out rates and increase the graduation rates of former foster youth, research is needed to understand what former foster youth who leave school need in order to reach their higher education goals.

General Discussion

Study 1 provided quantitative data on the higher education experiences of former foster youth while Study 2 provided qualitative data. Study 1 focused on the higher education experiences of underclassmen and students with higher academic standings. It was hypothesized that students with higher academic standings will have more resiliency characteristics. The goal

was to better understand what resiliency characteristics students with higher academic standings had in order to better meet the needs of youth transitioning from foster care to independence and higher education. Study 2 focused on identifying the barriers former foster youth faced while pursuing higher education. The goal was to identify solutions for combating the barriers that often cause former foster youth to drop-out, withdraw, or take a leave of absence at their postsecondary institutions. Qualitative data regarding barriers, recommendations and solutions were collected from former foster youth's perspectives.

From both the quantitative and qualitative data in the two studies, social support, medical insurance, and sufficient financial resources appeared to be some of the key resources former foster youth need in order to succeed in higher education. Without these key resources, former foster youth often had setbacks or troubles in continuing their education. One of the key findings from Study 1 is that underclassmen were more likely to currently have friends they knew while in foster care. There was also a trend that underclassmen were more likely to keep in contact with foster, group home, or kin-care parents. These relationships with peers and supportive adults serves as family-related and community protective factors (Hines, et al., 2005). This finding suggests that former foster youth may have permanency or connections when they leave the system, but subsequently lose the connections made in foster care after a few years of being on their own. They do not practice interdependence. In the field of child welfare, interdependence is the idea that independent living does not necessarily equal being completely on your own. Rather, a young person who leaves care will depend on themselves and other supportive adults for their needs. Results from Study 1 suggests that young people who leave care may not ask for help from people they knew from foster care. They venture out into the real world and practice independence, a skill that was perhaps taught either formally in an

Independent Living Program or informally from foster parents and institutional staff. Results from Study II showed that former foster youth have permanent, supportive adult figures in their lives. Most of the students in Study 2 were at least 21 years of age, been out of the foster care system, and living on their own for a few years. Some former foster youth's idea of permanence did not include lifelong, kin-like relationships with supportive adults. Rather, it included relationships with people such as social workers, mentors, professors, and therapists. These relationships are considered permanent-professional, meaning these supportive adults only provide guidance and support for completing their higher education goals. In contrast, permanent-parental relationships with adults not only provide guidance for completion of higher education goals but also providing a place for a former foster youth to stay during school breaks and holidays. In other words, permanent-parental relationships offer stability, which is a protective factor for resiliency (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005). The current research did not provide enough evidence to conclude that former foster youth without permanent-parental relationships fare poorly in their postsecondary institutions. However, students with permanent-parental relationships indicated having a place to go home for the holidays and having a reliable and consistent sense of support. Students without permanent-parental relationships lack that sense of stability in their lives and often indicated being stressed.

Another major need of former foster youth in order to succeed in higher education is adequate medical insurance. Although Study 1 indicates that the majority of the sample had health insurance, many more upperclassmen did not have state/government insurance. In Study 2, most of the participants indicated that medical insurance was a major issue for former foster youth. For those with medical insurance, participants from Study 2 mentioned paying out of pocket for medical insurance when they did not even use it. It was mentioned as a financial

burden to pay for medical insurance. For those without medical insurance, they have no options other than hoping that they would not get sick. The lack of medical insurance problem is ever present in the former foster care populations. Recommendations from former foster youth were expressed to solve this current problem.

While Study 1 and 2 indicate that former foster youth do have some financial resources available, it is often not enough. Most of the participants in Study 1 described their financial situation as fair. Study 2 participants often talk about struggling with paying for school and also paying for living expenses. More financial resources should be made available to former foster youth in higher education.

Limitations and Future Research

From past research, we do know that many former foster youth enter college and tend to drop out later (Barth, 1993; Pecora et. al., 2006). Thus, the hypothesis of Study 1 was that students with higher academic standings will be more likely to possess resiliency characteristics. Each semester and year completed is an indicator of achievement. Therefore, it makes sense that students with more educational experiences will be more likely to possess resiliency characteristics since they have not dropped out yet. However, the current sample was perhaps not the most accurate representation of the overall population of former foster youth in the United States of America. Most students were recruited from Orphan Foundation of America. Orphan Foundation of America scholars have a very high retention rate of students graduating and successfully completing the Orphan Foundation of America scholarship program. It can be suggested that the results of Study 1 were influenced by the large numbers of Orphan Foundation of American students in the sample. An effort to reach students with various backgrounds and educational experiences is needed for future research. Understanding the key differences

between underclassmen and students with higher academic standings is very important in identifying the barriers former foster youth face in higher education.

The high retention rate of Orphan Foundation of America scholars made recruiting students currently not in school difficult as well for Study 2. The other reason for difficulty in contacting participants for Study 2 was that this was a national study. Participants were recruited either by a direct telephone call or email. There was hardly any face to face contact. Establishing a personal relationship with participants in a face-to-face manner could have increased the probability of higher participation rates in Study 2. The lack of participation from students who were currently not in school made it difficult to identify the specific barriers that have caused them to leave their postsecondary institution. Identification of these specific barriers are necessary to improve programs that serve youth in foster care and youth who have aged out of the foster care system.

Conclusions

With over 20,000 foster youth leaving the system every year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003), the government should have a responsibility for the welfare of these young people. It should not discontinue at age 18. For the average youth that ages out at 18 from the foster care system, they often do not establish permanency as evidenced by the results of Study 2. Too often, these young people fall through the cracks of the U.S. foster care system. If the U.S. foster care system has the ability to take these children from their original environments and deem themselves as the caregivers or "parents" of these young people, the care and welfare of these youth should not end when they reach the age of majority. The U.S. government cannot make decisions on when to become parents of these young people and when to stop acting as

parents simply because these young people turn 18 and are no longer a part of the system. With continued support and services provided to former foster youth in higher education, former foster youth's graduation rates will be much higher and retention rates will be much lower.

From the current research, it is evident that former foster youth lose connections with people they knew while in foster care after a few years of leaving the system. This finding illuminates our system's sense of responsibility towards these young people. Although there is more national attention on the needs of young people who leave the system, very limited support is provided when it comes to education. Very few social workers and ILP workers provide youth with information about getting into higher education, availability of scholarships and financial aid, and support for higher education in general. Participants from Study 2 indicated that they had to search for information and resources for higher education themselves. One youth commented on her educational needs not being met while in the system when asked about her recommendations for improving the services for former foster youth in higher education:

> *....For people like me, they need to show me how I get into programs, how I stick with school, and why it is important for college. School needed to be more of a priority for foster kids when I was growing up. It was not a priority like I said. They would pull me out of school to go to group therapy. I missed classes, they didn't care. They didn't ever tell me that college was important. What was important was my behavior and this and that. When I turned 18, nobody cared about my behavior anymore. Everybody cared about, "Are you going to get a job? Are you going to get an apartment?" They could have better equipped me for that.*
>
> *(Female, 24, Sophomore, Community, In School)*

This statement illuminates the carelessness of the foster care system when it comes to the education of foster youth. If young people are lucky enough to get some information about higher education and resources available to them, the support is very limited. After achieving the goals of the independent living plan (which is a required document for social workers to fill out), a former foster youth's contact with their ILP worker becomes less frequent. However, there were some participants who mentioned that they talk to their workers currently but contact is very limited. These were the permanent-professional relationships mentioned earlier. The relationship usually lasts until they meet their job requirements. We can conclude that young people lose connections with people after a few years of leaving care. More research is needed to fill in the gaps of whether permanent-parental relationships are necessary for former foster youth to achieve success in higher education. A larger scale study comparing the educational outcomes of youth with permanent-parental and permanent-professional relationships is warranted.

As seen in previous research on resiliency (Hines et al., 2005), social supports serve as family and community related protective factors for former foster youth. The current research indicates that permanent-parental relationships may be beneficial for a former foster youth in terms of stability. However, we do not know for certain that permanent-parental relationships are necessary for positive outcomes in higher education. It is possible that a combination of permanent-professional and permanent-parental relationships is the most optimal for former foster youth in higher education.

In summary, it is necessary for the state to take further responsibility for the well-being and development of these young people who are forced to leave care at age 18 or 21. The foster care system as "parents" does not work when these young people exit the foster care system. Young people who have been through difficult life circumstances especially need more guidance

and support. We see from past and current research that barriers to higher education exist even among the most resilient former foster youth. More research needs to be done on the voices, opinions, and thoughts of former foster youth in higher education. Given that there is a lack of research that incorporates youth voice, it is most appropriate to end on a note from a former foster youth:

> *...I mean automatically, when you hear foster care, people assume these are just bad kids, getting into all kinds of trouble. Their parents don't want them. They're just gonna be another problem to society. They probably didn't graduate from high school. When I told people that I emancipated from foster care, they're like "Oh! But you're so rounded or oh, you're actually educated" like that's impossible....I know people in foster care that were just my friends in high school. That actually graduated from college, working on a master's. There are smart people out there you know. The whole conception of children in foster care is just terrible. If there was just ways to have more support in general, there is no encouragement for education. The programs are there. You never hear caseworkers or I haven't met any caseworkers who will actually encourage you. Who will actually sit there and say, "ok I'll make time in my office, let's look over some applications". Or even print out an application for you. You have the state there for you, but at the same time it's like the state wants to be involved as less as possible.*
>
> *(Female, 22, Senior, Private, In School)*

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Table 1.
Study 1 Demographics

	F1	F2	P1	P2	R1	R2	M1	M2
Gender								
Female	52	66	76.5%	91.7%				
Male	16	6	23.5%	8.3%				
Age in Years					18-26	18-37	20.22	22.61
Ethnicity								
African American	21	20	30.9%	27.8%				
American Indian	2	1	2.9%	1.4%				
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	1	2.9%	1.4%				
Mexican American or other Latino	3	7	4.4%	9.7%				
White or Caucasian	30	29	44.1%	40.3%				
Multi-ethnic	9	12	13.2%	16.7%				
Other	1	2	1.5%	2.8%				
Language other than English								
Yes	8	18	11.8%	25.0%				
Current relationship status								
Single-never been married	55	48	80.9%	66.7%				
Living as couple	8	7	11.8%	9.7%				
Married-living with spouse	1	12	1.5%	16.7%				
Divorce	2	2	2.9%	2.8%				
Married-not living with spouse	0	0	0.0%	0.0%				
Legally separated	0	1	0.0%	1.4%				
Have children								
Yes	5	18	7.4%	25.0%				
If yes, how many?					1-2	1-3	1.93	1.74

Note: Key for Tables

F1= Frequency of Underclassmen
F2=Frequency of Upperclassmen
P1=Percentages of Underclassmen
P2=Percentages of Upperclassmen
R1=Range of Underclassmen
R2=Range of Upperclassmen
M1=Mean of Underclassmen
M2=Mean of Upperclassmen

Table 2.
History in Out-of-Home Care and Preparation for Independent Living

	F1	F2	P1	P2	R1	R2	M1	M2
Number of years in out-of-home care					1-19	0.5-20	7.24	6.76
Age (in years) when first placed in out-of-home care					<1-17	<1-17	10.48	11.05
Number of out-of-home placements while in foster care					1-50	1-30	6.04	6.06
Types of placements while in out-of-home care								
Non-relative foster home	55	56	80.9%	77.8%				
Relative foster home	24	32	35.3%	44.4%				
Group home	27	40	39.7%	55.6%				
Friend's house	15	25	22.1%	34.7%				
Residential home	14	16	20.6%	22.2%				
Shelter	19	13	27.9%	18.1%				
Apartment	9	9	13.2%	12.5%				
Transitional living home	6	8	8.8%	11.1%				
Boarding house	1	2	1.5%	2.8%				
Other placement	7	7	10.3%	9.7%				
Ever run away from a out-of-home placement	27	25	39.7%	34.7%				
Enrolled in an independent living skills program	52	49	76.5%	68.1%				
Preparedness for independent living while emancipated								
Well prepared	25	20	36.8%	27.8%				
Somewhat prepared	29	29	42.6%	40.3%				
Not well prepared	14	20	20.6%	27.8%				

Table 3.
Educational History

	F1	F2	P1	P2	R1	R2	M1	M2
While in out-of-home care:								
Number of elementary schools:					0-10	0-11	2.07	2.16
Number of middle schools:					0-7	0-5	1.44	1.48
Number of high schools:					0-7	0-13	2.30	2.44
Highest level of schooling completed:								
Less than high school	1	1	1.5%	1.4%				
Some high school	5	11	7.4%	15.3%				
GED	2	5	2.9%	6.9%				
Completed high school	40	33	58.8%	45.8%				
Some college	20	22	29.4%	30.6%				
Activities and experiences in high school:								
Extracurricular activities	53	51	77.9%	70.8%				
College preparedness	36	41	52.9%	56.9%				
Advising about college	34	34	50.0%	47.2%				
Information about financial aid	39	35	57.4%	48.6%				
Tutoring	17	13	25.0%	18.1%				
Special education classes	5	5	7.4%	6.9%				
Other experiences	11	15	16.2%	20.8%				
Number of years to finish high school diploma/GED					2-12	0.5-6	4.21	3.88
Overall high school GPA					2-4.75	2-4.3	3.16	3.378
Activities and experiences most important in decision to go to college:								
Information about financial aid	46	44	67.6%	61.1%				
Advising about college	37	36	54.4%	50.0%				
College preparation classes	23	22	33.8%	30.6%				
Extracurricular activities	25	20	36.8%	27.8%				
Tutoring	10	8	14.7%	11.1%				
Special education	2	1	2.9%	1.4%				
Other	17	17	25.0%	23.6%				
Age when first began college				17-24	16-23	18.35	18.38	
Type of college/university prior to current/most recently attended institution:								
Community/vocational/tech	23	27	33.8%	37.5%				
Public college/university	15	18	22.1%	25.0%				
Private college/university	9	15	13.2%	20.8%				
Other	1	1	1.5%	1.4%				
Not applicable	20	11	29.4%	15.3%				

Table 4.
Current Educational Experiences

	F1	F2	P1	P2	R1	R2	M1	M2
Transfer student	15	34	22.1%	47.2%				
If yes, number of postsecondary institutions attended.					1-4	1-4	2.24	2.11
Live on campus	25	17	36.8%	234.6%				
If off-campus, current living situation:								
Rent apartment	23	30	33.8%	41.7%				
Rent room	5	4	7.4%	5.6%				
Live with parents	1	1	1.5%	1.4%				
Own house	0	4	0.0%	5.6%				
Rent house	7	11	10.3%	15.3%				
Other	3	2	4.4%	2.8%				
Type of college/university currently enrolled:								
Community/vocational/tech	28	12	41.2%	16.7%				
Public/private college/university	40	60	58.8%	83.3%				
Other	0	0	0.0%	0.0%				
Current proposed major:								
Social sciences	21	28	30.91%	38.9%				
Education	7	6	10.3%	8.3%				
Business	10	12	14.7%	16.7%				
Humanities	7	9	10.3%	12.5%				
Social work	11	5	16.2%	6.9%				
Health professions	5	11	7.4%	15.3%				
Engineering	0	2	0.0%	2.8%				
Life sciences	1	1	1.5%	1.4%				
Physical sciences	9	3	13.2%	4.2%				
Undecided	6	1	8.8%	1.4%				
Other	6	3	8.8%	4.2%				
Current degree objective								
Associates (AA)	22	9	32.4%	12.5%				
Bachelors (BA/BS)	40	57	58.8%	79.2%				
Masters/JD/other professional	0	1	0.0%	1.4%				
Doctorate/PhD	0	2	0.0%	2.9%				
Other	0	0	0.0%	0.0%				
Final degree objective								
Associates (AA)	2	2	2.9%	2.8%				
Bachelors (BA/BS)	17	13	25.0%	18.1%				
Masters/JD/other professional	26	31	38.2%	43.1%				
Doctorate/PhD	20	22	29.4%	30.6%				
Other	0	1	0.0%	1.4%				
Current overall GPA					1.7-4.0	2-4	3.01	3.18
Major barriers to obtaining services:								
Lack of time	29	39	42.6%	54.2%				
Did not know how to obtain services	15	11	22.1%	15.3%				
Did not know where to obtain services	17	10	25.0%	13.9%				
Transportation problems	14	14	20.6%	19.4%				
Language barriers	0	1	0.0%	1.4%				
No barriers	18	18	26.5%	25.0%				
Other	8	17	11.8%	23.6%				
Ever withdrew, taken a leave of absence, or dropped out?	19	15	27.9%	20.8%				
If yes, how many months away?					0-36	2-28	11.06	8.79
Currently thinking about withdrawing or taking a leave of absence?	4	6	5.9%	8.3%				
How well did the foster care system prepare you for college?								

Extremely well	6	3	8.8%	4.2%
Fairly well	25	19	36.8%	26.4%
Not very well	35	47	51.5%	65.3%

Table 5.
Financial Resources and Social Support

	F1	F2	P1	P2	R1	R2	M1	M2
Currently supporting self through:								
Financial aid	60	61	88.2%	84.7%				
Employment	51	48	75.0%	66.7%				
Scholarship	50	59	73.5%	81.9%				
Help from family	15	6	22.1%	8.3%				
Help from friends	12	3	17.6%	4.2%				
Public assistance	11	9	16.2%	12.5%				
Money saved while in foster care	9	3	13.2%	4.2%				
Money from other sources	8	9	11.8%	12.5%				
Current work situation:								
Off-campus work	31	39	45.6%	54.2%				
On-campus work	13	7	19.1%	9.7%				
Both on and off-campus work	3	8	4.4%	11.1%				
Do not work	18	17	26.5%	23.6%				
If employed, number of hours worked weekly?					3-65	7-50	23.47	29.01
Current financial situation								
Excellent	3	0	4.4%	0.0%				
Very good	3	4	4.4%	5.6%				
Good	17	22	25.0%	30.6%				
Fair	23	30	33.8%	41.7%				
Poor	21	16	30.9%	22.2%				
Compared to others your age, financial situation is:								
Better	9	9	13.2%	12.5%				
About the same	32	39	47.1%	54.2%				
Worse	27	21	39.7%	29.2				
Do you have someone to borrow $200 from?								
Yes	40	33	58.8%	45.8%				
If yes, person's relationship to you:								
Family member	16	16	40.0%	45.8%				
Friend	6	9	15.0%	27.3%				
Member of foster family	11	3	27.5%	9.1%				
Mentor	4	3	10.0%	9.1%				
Neighbor	0	0	0.0%	0.0%				
Teacher or other staff	0	1	0.0%	3.3%				
Coach	0	0	0.0%	0.0%				
Counselor or therapist	0	0	0.0%	0.0%				
Social worker	0	0	0.0%	0.0%				
Other relationships	1	1	2.5%	3.3%				
Current friends foster care	44	33	64.7%	45.8%				
Maintain contact (foster, group, kin-care)	52	454	76.5%	62.5%				
Maintain contact with your birth family	52	55	76.5%	76.4%				
Maintain contact (caseworkers & counselors)	36	31	52.9%	43.1%				
Ever been without a place to sleep	20	27	29.4%	37.5%				
Number of nights without a place to sleep					1-365	1-60	48.38	13.11

Table 6. Health, Mental Health, Substance Use Problems and Delinquency

	F1	F2	P1	P2
Compared to others your age, what is your present health status?				
Excellent	12	11	17.6%	15.3%
Very good	21	21	30.9%	29.2%
Good	19	23	27.9%	31.9%
Fair	14	11	20.6%	15.3%
Poor	2	6	2.9%	8.3%
Are you currently covered by health insurance?	48	53	70.6%	73.6%
If yes, what type of insurance do you have?				
State/Government Insurance	34	16	72.3%	30.2%
Private Insurance	9	26	19.1%	49.1%
School Insurance	4	10	8.5%	18.9%
Other insurance	0	1	0.0%	1.9%
If you do not have health insurance, how do you feel about that?				
Very concerned	15	14	75.0%	82.4%
Somewhat concerned	2	2	10.0%	11.8%
Not concerned	3	1	15.0%	5.9%
Since being discharged from foster care, have you always been able to get medical care?				
Yes, always able	25	24	36.8%	33.3%
No, sometimes unable	39	44	57.4%	61.1%
Did not need medical care	3	2	4.4%	2.8%
Since being discharged from foster care, have you ever received mental health services?				
Yes	21	25	30.9%	34.7%
***If yes, what type of mental health services did you receive?**				
Therapy or counseling	16	25	69.6%	83.3%
Outpatient services	4	1	17.4%	3.3%
Inpatient services	2	4	8.7%	13.3%
Other services	1	0	4.3%	0.0%
Do you currently have a problem with drinking?				
Yes	1	1	1.5%	1.4%
While in foster care, did you ever receive alcohol treatment services?				
Yes	6	2	8.8%	2.8%
Since being discharged from foster care, did you ever received alcohol treatment services?				
Yes	2	2	2.9%	2.8%
Do you currently have a problem with drug use?				
Yes	2	0	2.9%	0.0%
While in foster care, did you ever receive drug treatment services?				
Yes	6	3	8.8%	4.2%
Since being discharged from foster care, did you ever receive drug treatment?				
Yes	4	2	5.9%	2.8%
Have you ever done something illegal to get money?				
Yes	13	15	19.1%	20.8%
Were you ever arrested while in foster care?				
Yes	12	12	17.6%	16.7%
Have you ever resided in juvenile hall **anytime before leaving foster care?**				
Yes	15	9	22.1%	12.5%
Since being discharged from foster care, have you ever had a problem with the law?				
Yes	15	9	22.1%	12.5%
Did the incident involve alcohol?				
Yes	4	2	26.7%	22.2%
Did the incident involve drugs?				
Yes	5	0	33.3%	0.0%
Were you arrested?				
Yes	10	6	66.7%	66.7%

Table 7.
Life Satisfaction

	F1	F2	P1	P2
Overall, how happy are you with your life these days				
Very happy	18	24	26.5%	33.3%
Somewhat happy	39	42	57.4%	58.3%
Not very happy	9	5	13.2%	6.9%
Overall, how hopeful are you about the future?				
Very hopeful	41	50	60.3%	69.4%
Somewhat hopeful	20	21	29.4%	29.2%
Not very hopeful	5	1	7.4%	1.4%

Appendix A.

Demographics

1) What is your gender?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Prefer not to answer

2) How old are you?

3) What do you consider as your primary racial and/or ethnic group?
   a. African American
   b. American Indian
   c. Asian/Pacific Islander
   d. Mexican American or other Latino
   e. White or Caucasian
   f. Multi-ethnic
   g. Prefer not to answer
   h. Other (please specify: _____)

4) Did you speak a language other than English while growing up?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

5) What is your current relationship status?
   a. Single-never married
   b. Living as couple
   c. Married-living with spouse
   d. Divorced
   e. Married-not living with spouse
   f. Legally separated
   g. Prefer not to answer

6) Have you given birth or fathered children?
   a. Yes (go to question 7)
   b. No (go to question 8)

7) If yes, how many children do you have?

History in Out-of-Home Care and Preparation for Independent Living

8) How many years total did you spend in out-of-home care?

9) How old were you (in years) when you were first placed in out-of-home care?

10) What is the number of out-of-home placements you have had while in foster care?

11) What types of placements did you have while in out-of-home care? Please check all that apply.

a. Non-relative foster home
b. Relative foster home
c. Group home
d. Friend's home
e. Residential home
f. Shelter
g. Apartment
h. Transitional living home
i. Boarding home
j. Other placement (please specify: _____)

12) Did you ever run away from an out-of-home placement?
a. Yes
b. No

13) Were you enrolled in an independent living skills program?
a. Yes
b. No

14) Overall, how prepared did you feel for independent living when emancipated?
a. Well prepared
b. Somewhat prepared
c. Not well prepared

Educational History

15) While in out-of-home care, what were the…
a. Number of elementary schools attended:
b. Number of middle schools attended:
c. Number of high schools attended:

16) What was the highest level of schooling completed at time of emancipation or other discharge from the child welfare system?
a. Less than high school
b. Some high school
c. GED
d. Completed high school
e. Some college

17) Which of the following describes your activities and experiences in high school? Please check all that apply.
    a. Extra curricular activities
    b. College preparation
    c. Advising about college
    d. Information about financial aid
    e. Tutoring
    f. Special education classes
    g. Other experiences (please specify: _____)

18) How many years did it take you to compete high school or obtain your GED?

19) What was your overall high school grade point average?

20) What activities and experiences were most important in your decision to go to college?
    a. Information about financial aid
    b. Advising about college
    c. College preparation classes
    d. Extracurricular activities
    e. Tutoring
    f. Special education
    g. Other experiences (please specify: _____)

21) How old were you (in years) when you first began college?

22) If applicable, what type of college or university did you previously attend prior to your current postsecondary institution?
    a. Community college/vocational/technical
    b. Public college or university
    c. Private college or university
    d. Other type of college or university (please specify: _____)
    e. Not applicable

Current Educational Experiences

23) What is your current academic class level?
    a. Freshman
    b. Sophomore
    c. Junior
    d. Senior
    e. Graduated

24) Are you a transfer student?
Yes (go to question 25)
No (go to question 26)

25) If yes, how many post-secondary institutions have you been in?

26) Do you live on campus?
a. Yes (go to question 28)
b. No (go to question 27)

27) If off-campus, what is your current living situation?
a. Rent apartment
b. Rent room
c. Live with parents
d. Own house
e. Rent house
f. Other (please specify: _____)

28) What type of college or university are you currently enrolled in?
a. Community college/vocational/technical
b. Public college or university
c. Private college or university
d. Other type of college or university (please specify: _____)

29) What is your current proposed major?
a. Social sciences
b. Education
c. Business
d. Humanities
e. Social work
f. Health professions
g. Engineering
h. Life sciences
i. Physical sciences
j. Other (please specify: _____)

30) What is your current degree objective?
a. Associate's degree (AA)
b. Bachelor's degree (BA/BS)
c. Master's degree
d. Doctorate/PhD

31) What is your final degree objective
a. Associate's degree (AA)
b. Bachelor's degree (BA/BS)
c. Master's degree

d. Doctorate/PhD

32) What is your most current overall GPA?

33) What are the major barriers to obtaining needed services at your university? Please check all that apply.
   a. Lack of time
   b. Did not know how to obtain services
   c. Did not know where to obtain services
   d. Transportation problems
   e. Language difficulties
   f. No barriers
   g. Other (please specify: _____)

34) Have you ever withdrawn, taken a leave of absence, or dropped out of your current post-secondary institution?
   a. Yes (go to question 35)
   b. No (go to question 36)

35) If so, how many months were you away from your current post-secondary institution?

36) Are you currently thinking of withdrawing or taking a leave of absence?
   a. Yes
   b. No

37) How well did the foster care system prepare you for college?
   a. Extremely well
   b. Fairly well
   c. Not very well

Financial Resources and Social Support

38) How are you currently supporting yourself? Please check all that apply
   a. Financial aid
   b. Employment
   c. Scholarship
   d. Help from family
   e. Help from friends
   f. Public assistance
   g. Money saved while in foster care
   h. Money from other sources (please specify: _____)

39) What is your current work situation?
   a. Off-campus work (go to question 40)
   b. On-campus work (go to question 40)
   c. Both on and off-campus work (go to question 40)

d. Do not work (go to question 41)

40) If employed, how many hours do you work per week?

41) Describe your current financial situation.
a. Excellent
b. Very good
c. Good
d. Fair
e. Poor

42) Compared to others your age, would you describe your financial situation as:
a. Better
b. About the same
c. Worse

43) Do you have someone to borrow $200 from?
a. Yes (go to question 44)
b. No (go to question 45)

44) If yes, what is your relationship with this person?
a. Family member
b. Friend
c. Member of foster family
d. Mentor
e. Neighbor
f. Teacher or other staff
g. Coach
h. Counselor or therapist
i. Social worker
j. Other relationships (please specify: _____)

45) Do your current friends include people you knew while in foster care?
a. Yes
b. No

46) Do you maintain contact with foster, group home, or kin-care parents?
a. Yes
b. No

47) Do you maintain contact with your birth family?
a. Yes
b. No

48) Do you maintain contact with past caseworkers or counselors?

a. Yes
b. No

49) Have you ever been without a place to sleep?
a. Yes (go to question 50)
b. No (go to question 51)

50) If yes, how many nights did you spend without a place to sleep?

Health, Mental Health, Substance Use Problems and Delinquency

51) Compared to others your age, what is your present health status?
a. Excellent
b. Very good
c. Good
d. Fair
e. Poor

52) Are you currently covered by health insurance?
a. Yes (go to question 53)
b. No (go to question 54)

53) If yes, what type of health insurance do you have? (Skip question 54)
a. Minnesota Medical Assistance
b. Minnesota Care
c. Private insurance
d. School insurance
e. Other Insurance (please specify: _____)

54) If you do not have health insurance, how do you feel about that?
a. Very concerned
b. Somewhat concerned
c. Not concerned

55) Since being discharged from foster care, have you always been able to get medical care?
a. Yes, always able
b. No, sometimes unable
c. Did not need medical care

56) Since being discharged from foster care, have you ever received mental health services?
a. Yes (go to question 57)
b. No (go to question 58)

57) If yes, what type of mental health services did you receive?
a. Therapy or counseling

b. Outpatient services
c. Inpatient services
d. Other services (please specify: _____)

58) Do you currently have a problem with drinking?
a. Yes (go to question 59)
b. No (go to question 61)

59) While in foster care, did you ever receive alcohol treatment services?
a. Yes
b. No

60) Since being discharged from foster care, did you ever receive alcohol treatment services?
a. Yes
b. No

61) Do you currently have a problem with drug use?
a. Yes (go to question 62)
b. No (go to question 64)

62) While in foster care, did you ever receive drug treatment services?
a. Yes
b. No

63) Since being discharged from foster care, did you ever receive drug treatment services?
a. Yes
b. No

64) Have you ever done something illegal to get money?
a. Yes
b. No

65) Were you ever arrested while in foster care?
a. Yes
b. No

66) Have you ever resided in juvenile hall anytime before leaving foster care?
a. Yes
b. No

67) Since being discharged from foster care, have you ever had a problem with the law?
a. Yes (go to question 68)
b. No (go to question 71)

68) Did the incident involve alcohol?

a. Yes
b. No

69) Did the incident involve drugs?
a. Yes
b. No

70) Were you arrested?
a. Yes
b. No

Life Satisfaction

71) Overall, how happy are you with your life these days?
a. Very happy
b. Somewhat happy
c. Not very happy

72) Overall, how hopeful are you about the future?
a. Very hopeful
b. Somewhat hopeful
c. Not very hopeful

Appendix B.

Contact Information

Name:

Address:

Email(s):

Phone Number(s):

Where would you like your gift card sent?

Age:

Year in School:

Type of Institution:

Interview Questions (for students that have dropped out/leave of absence)

1) *What made you decide to leave your most recently attended post-secondary institution? (If necessary: Do you plan to go back?)*

2) *What would have helped you continue in your most recently attended post-secondary institution?*

Interview Questions (for students currently enrolled for Spring 2008 or graduates)

1) *What made you decide to stay at your current post-secondary institution?*

2) *What helped you in continuing school at your current post-secondary institution?*

Questions for EVERYONE

1) *Do you have a permanent, supportive adult figure(s) in your life? This includes birth parents, foster parents, social workers, mentors, professors/instructors, etc. It does not include friends, peers, and significant others.*

a) If yes, how has this adult(s) helped you or not helped you with achieving higher education?

b) If no, how would an adult(s) help you with achieving higher education?

2) ***Do you have a sense of community or belonging in the post-secondary institution you currently/most recently attended? If yes, how so? If no, why not?***

3) ***Who are the people that have helped you achieve your higher education goals? (If needed: How have they helped you?)***

4) ***Have you maintained contact with people you knew while in the foster care system? (If needed: Who are these people?)***
   a) If yes, what factors contributed to maintaining contact with them?
   b) If no, what factors contributed to not maintaining contact with them.

5) ***Do you currently work? How has that positively or negatively affected your academics?***

6) ***How has your experience in the foster care system prepared you or have NOT prepared you for higher education?***

7) ***What are some recommendations for improving the services available to former foster youth pursuing higher education?***

8) ***Have you changed schools? What was your experience with changing schools like?***

9) ***How do you feel about the health care insurance options available to you? (If needed: Do you have health insurance? What does your insurance cover?)***

10) ***How do you feel about the health care options available to you? (If needed: If you get sick, where do you go? Access to services, i.e. Mental, dentist, physical)***