

4-H Youth Futures College Within Reach Conference

*University of Missouri Extension/4-H Center for Youth Development, and
Lincoln University Cooperative Extension*

2006 Evaluation Summary

Abstract

The 4-H Youth Futures College Within Reach Program, developed by the University of Missouri Extension/4-H Center for Youth Development and Lincoln University Cooperative Extension, was designed to promote college as an obtainable goal for high school youth who are not typically encouraged to attend college (i.e., ethnic/minority groups and first-generation students). 4-H Youth Futures College Within Reach is an extensive college orientation program that includes a conference on the University of Missouri (MU) and Lincoln University (LU) campuses and pre and post conference mentoring. The goal of the program is to help youth go to college and stay in college.

Youth Futures participants that graduated from high school in 2006 began the program as freshmen, sophomores, juniors or seniors from 2002 to 2006. Within the 2006 cohort there was a 98% high school graduation rate. Of the 33 participants who graduated from high school in 2006, 21 (64%) enrolled in college. Post-secondary activity of the remaining nine high school graduates is as follows: five (15%) entered the workforce, three (9%) moved out of the area and four (12%) dropped out of the program

Since the inception of Youth Futures 172 youth (duplicates removed) have participated in the program (41 youth in 2002; 61 in 2003; and 57 in 2004; 48 in 2005; and 47 in 2006).

Of the 57 participants who graduated from high school from 2002 to 2005, 30 (53%) are currently college sophomores, juniors or seniors. Four (7%) have graduated from community colleges. Six participants (10%) entered but later dropped out of college. Two (4%) participants joined the military and seven participants (12%) are working. Six participants (10%) were unable to be located and two (4%) moved to another state.

Many parents report that the program has a strong impact on youth. They report that their adolescent(s) is more serious about high school, setting goals and improving behavior.

Introduction - Non-traditional College Students

Many colleges and universities are increasing their efforts to recruit and retain non-traditional students such as first-generation college students, ethnic minority groups, and students from working-class families (Padron, 1992). Many of these non-traditional students, though, are less prepared for college – academically, psychologically and financially – than students who come from college-educated families (Pascarella, 2004). They may have weaker reading and math skills, as well as lower degree aspirations (Terenzini et al, 1995).

Tinto (1987), however, found that only 15 percent of students drop out of college because of academic failure; most leave because of personal, financial, or social problems. The ability to handle these new demands during the first year of college is critical to success in college and to eventual graduation. Further, first-generation beginning students are two times as likely as students with a parent with a college degree to leave before their second year (Choy, 2001). But many non-traditional students must overcome additional obstacles on the path to a college degree.

One of the greatest challenges confronting many non-traditional students is family tension that is often generated when children choose a path in life that deviates from that of their parents and family. Accordingly, many non-traditional students may find their academic efforts met with resistance from family members who fail to understand the demands or rewards of college (Striplin, 1999).

Non-traditional students may also lack important “college survival” skills in time management, budgeting, and interacting with large educational bureaucracies (Vargas, 2004; Richardson and Skinner, 1992). As a result, they may find the campus educational system confusing and intimidating.

Because of these challenges many potential students may not view college as a viable option. Or, once enrolled they may not experience support systems that help them achieve success. Although these skill and motivational challenges can be overcome, they make the transition to college more difficult.

Strategies for Supporting Non-Traditional Students

One of the most popular methods used to help all students make a smooth transition to college is an orientation course. Orientation programs vary from school to school, but all are designed to introduce students to some of the practical skills necessary for success and to expose them to the college’s programs, procedures, and support services. It is particularly important for non-traditional students to complete an orientation course that not only addresses social adjustment issues, but also outlines the level of student effort required and support systems available for success in college (Mitchell, 2001).

Youth Futures College Within Reach Program

University of Missouri Extension/4-H Center for Youth Development and Lincoln University Cooperative Extension developed the Youth Futures College Within Reach Program to promote college as an obtainable goal for high school youth who are not typically encouraged to attend college (i.e., ethnic/minority groups, first-generation students, etc.). Youth Futures College Within Reach is an extensive college orientation program that includes a conference on the MU and LU campuses and pre and post conference mentoring. The goal of the program is to help youth go to college and stay in college.

The program has been on-going since 2002 and each year targets 60 high school youth that meet the following criteria:

- Engaged in an MU or LU Extension/4-H program
 - Current high school student that has completed at least the 9th grade
- In addition, the conference specifically targets youth that:
- Have financial need
 - May be a first-generation college student
 - Need assistance in understanding the steps to be successful in college

MU and LU Extension/4-H Youth Development staff and volunteers plan and implement the program each year. Extension staff members and volunteers market the program by talking individually with youth and parents currently involved in Extension programs in St. Louis, Kansas City, and the mid-Missouri area (Columbia and Jefferson City).

Conference

Each year the Youth Futures Conference helps youth learn about academic programs, student life activities, and college survival skills. Participants also learn about financial assistance and receive resources and information regarding campus life and college attendance. Residing in college dorms, attending workshops, and participating in MU, LU, and community activities provides youths the experiences they need to prepare for and be successful in college. In addition, a practice ACT test is administered to prepare youth for this important step toward college enrollment. If a mentor determines it is warranted and valuable, some youth attend the conference more than one time. Returning youth participate in a specialized track that offers advanced workshops and builds on earlier conference experiences.

Mentoring

Before and after the conference, LU and MU Extension staff members and volunteers serve as mentors to youth to provide a continuous support system as they prepare for college. Mentors have contact with youth at least quarterly to discuss college preparation (i.e., grades, study skills, applications and scholarship forms, ACT tests, etc.).

Assessment of Program Outcomes - Process

Once enrolled in the Youth Futures program, participant preparation for college (ACT preparation, completing college and scholarship applications, enrolling in college, etc.) is tracked each year via a database. Yearly progress is tracked from the time youth attend the conference for the first time until their sophomore year in college.

2006 Program Outcomes

Demographic Information

The fifth annual conference was held July 24 – 27, 2006 on the MU and LU campuses. Forty-seven youth from Kansas City, St. Louis, Jefferson City, and Columbia attended the conference. Of these, 51% were female and 49% were male. The mean age was 15.84 (range 13-19). Racial/ethnic data shows that 90% of participants were African American, 8% Latino, and 2% Caucasian. Family structure data revealed that 51% of participants live in a two-parent household while 23% live in single-parent households.

The remaining participants live in foster parent households (2%), and with relatives (23%).

Short-Term Outcomes

Before the conference a significant number of youth (51%) reported uncertainty about going to college. These attitudes changed after the conference because 98% of participants reported that they believe they can go to college and now plan to do so.

Participants reported learning:

- “There are a lot of resources out there, there are a lot of people who want to help me. I am going to college.”
- “I can get money for college, what it is like to live in college and how to choose a college.”
- “Never give up, you can do anything as long as you know you can do it.”
- “More about myself, what I need to do for college, and about staying in college.”
- “How to manage my money, how important it is to go to college.”
- “Success, responsibility and attitude.”

Participants reported that they learned what they need to do to go to college (94%), where to find financial assistance for college (91%), and who to consult for help regarding college (91%). In addition, 97% were in agreement that they now had a better understanding about college.

Quotes from participants about what they learned from the conference and how presenters and mentors inspired them:

- “I don't want to struggle throughout life to make ends meet. I want to become educated and be able to support myself without having to rely on others. I've seen people struggle without a college education and I hope to be the first in my immediate family to graduate from college.”
- “The three things I learned from the conference were: never give up, you can do anything as long as you know you can do it, and don't go to a college just because all your friends are going there – meet new friends.”
- I want to get the feeling and learn what it takes to be successful at the university level. Being able to experience what it is like to live in college will better prepare me. I plan on going to the University of Missouri. I think the Youth Futures Conference will help me get the realistic perspective of what life in college is like. I want to learn how to apply for scholarships and financial aid.
- I have planned on attending college since I was in 6th grade. I am very interested in going to college. I have been working hard trying to improve my grades to enable me to go to the University of Missouri. I am aware that obtaining a good education is the key to a better life and my future. I want to access the opportunities like the Youth Futures program which will enhance my quality of life now and in the future.
- I am interested in attending college because I've seen people who didn't go to college struggle and they can't afford to pay the bills sometimes and they get

many things often turned off. Now a days you can't get a good job unless you have a college education.

- Because I want to learn more about the ACT and why colleges look at certain things more than others and what those certain things are.
- If it weren't for people like your organization a black kid getting a chance to get into college and be prepared for it would be impossible.
- Thank you for caring about us kids. Because some mornings some of us wake and wonder if anyone cares about us. And after today I realize someone does.

Intermediate Outcomes

2006 High School Graduates

Youth Futures participants that graduated from high school in 2006 began the program as freshmen, sophomores and juniors from 2002 to 2005. Within the 2006 cohort there was a 100% high school graduation rate. Of the 33 participants who graduated from high school in 2006, 21 (64%) enrolled in college. The universities and colleges include: University of Missouri (5), Clark Atlanta University, Moberly Area Community College, Spellman University, Jefferson Community College – Hillsboro, University of Missouri - Kansas City (3), Penn Valley Community College, Lincoln University, Missouri Southern University (2), Southeast Missouri University, Donnelly College, DeVry Institute, Florissant Valley Community College and Forrest Park Community College.

Post-secondary activity of the remaining 12 high school graduates is as follows: five (15%) entered the workforce, three (9%) moved out of the area and four (12%) dropped out of the program.

Overall Program Status - 2002-2006 High School Graduates:

- Since the inception of Youth Futures 172 youth (duplicates removed) have participated in the program (41 youth in 2002; 61 in 2003; and 57 in 2004; 48 in 2005; and 47 in 2006).
- Of the 57 participants who graduated from high school from 2002 to 2005, 30 (53%) are currently college sophomores, juniors or seniors. Four (7%) have graduated from community colleges. Six participants (10%) entered but later dropped out of college. Two (4%) participants joined the military after high school graduation and seven participants (12%) are working. Six participants (10%) were unable to be located and two (4%) moved to another state.
- Many participants report moving from average to below average grades to honor roll status in high school, engaging in community service and local community and school leadership positions. Several high school youth are members of the National Honor Society.
- Many parents report that the program has a strong impact on youth. They report that their adolescent(s) is more serious about high school, setting goals and improving behavior.

Conclusion

Youth Futures College Within Reach is an essential program that makes college an achievable goal for youth not typically encouraged to go to college. The on-site campus experiences coupled with a caring adult (mentor) motivates youth and helps them navigate the many steps of getting into and staying in college.

2006 Financial Support

Missouri 4-H Foundation, MU Vice Provost for Extension, MU Deputy Chancellor Office, and Lincoln University.

2006 Program/Inkind Support

Practical Parenting Partnerships
Bucks Ice Cream.

For more information about the 4-H Youth Futures College Within Reach program contact:

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