

4-H Youth Futures College Within Reach Conference

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

2007 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., first-generation college students). 4-H Youth Futures 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 high school freshmen, sophomores, juniors or seniors from 2003 to 2007. Of the 31 participants who graduated from high school in 2007, 24 (77.4%) enrolled in college. Post-secondary activity of the remaining seven participants is as follows: one (3.2%) entered the workforce, two (6.4%) are stay-at-home mothers and four (13%) dropped out of the program.

Since the inception of Youth Futures 210 youth (duplicates removed) have participated in the program (41 youth in 2002; 61 in 2003; and 57 in 2004; 48 in 2005; 47 in 2006; and 57 in 2007).

One hundred and eighteen participants are currently in high school. Of the 92 participants scheduled to graduate from high school from 2002 to 2006, 13 (14%) have graduated from college. Forty-two (46%) are currently college sophomores, juniors or seniors. Eight participants (9%) entered but later dropped out of college. Two (2%) participants joined the military and 12 participants (13%) are working. Ten participants (11 %) were unable to be located or dropped out of the program and five (5%) moved to another state.

In spring 2007, focus group research was conducted with a small (n=5) sample of Youth Futures graduates enrolled at two institutions. Students reported that the relationship with their Youth Futures mentor was a critical factor in their success in college with mentors viewed as a primary source of social support. Students reported that the program met tangible needs that their families couldn't meet. Other benefits identified were the formation of friendships and social support networks, having someone on campus that they knew, and workshops designed to help with transition into college life.

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 they either graduate from college or four years after high school graduation.

2007 Program Outcomes

Demographic Information

The sixth annual conference was held July 23 – 26, 2007 on the MU and LU campuses. Fifty-seven youth from Kansas City, St. Louis, Jefferson City, and Columbia attended the conference. Of these, (64%) were female and (36%) were male. The mean age was 15.21 (range 13-19).

Racial/ethnic data:

- 85% are African American
- 7.5% are Latino
- 7.5% are Caucasian

Family structure data:

- 45% live in a two-parent household
- 43% live in single-parent households
- 12% live with relatives or foster families

Short-Term Outcomes

Before the conference a 21 youth (40%) reported uncertainty about going to college. These attitudes changed after the conference because 51 (96%) participants reported that they believe they can go to college and now plan to do so. Participants reported learning:

- “How to enroll, financial aid, transfer plans”
- “Benefits of a college education, info on MU, and which college I want to attend”
- “How to stay positive, think beyond, and be prepared”
- “College life, what is needed to get into college, SATs and ACTs aren’t a joke”
- “Life is hard and money is hard to balance, buy what you need before what you want, scholarships for college”
- “College is not all fun and games, life is hard and college is needed”
- “Being safe and what I am looking for in a college and what they are looking for in me”

Participants reported that they learned what they need to do to go to college (91%), where to find financial assistance for college (91%), and who to consult for help regarding college (89%). In addition, 96% were in agreement that they now had a better understanding about college.

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

- Thank you so much for your help in making my Youth Futures experience a memorable, fun and learning experience. Being at Futures has taught me many things like communicating with people from different races.

- Thank you truly for everything. _____ spread the word but (about the program) you showed the way. I mean you came to pick us up all those mornings and made this program part of my life. I believe you care about me – that’s why I care about this program.
- Thank you for putting effort into showing that you believe in me and the other attendants of this conference. I want to major in business and music composition so I can start my own recording studio. Your effort and belief motivate me to capture my dreams.
- Thank you for providing this great opportunity for me and my peers. This experience opened my eyes, as well as others, to the inside look on college life. I greatly appreciate it.
- Your sincerity inspired me. I wanted to go to college with my whole being and you showed me it was possible. You made my conference time fun and helped me befriend people I normally wouldn’t. I hope someday I can be up there like you, telling my story and moving heaven and earth to get the next generation to do something great.
- I wanted to thank you for being an excellent support system when I needed to talk to someone and couldn’t.
- Youth Futures is different for everyone. I came with an expectation for excitement and energy. I didn’t get that. Instead I received a moment of clarity out of this world! That is what I’ll take from Youth Futures 2007.

Intermediate Outcomes

2007 High School Graduates

Youth Futures participants that graduated from high school in 2007 began the program as freshmen, sophomores and juniors from 2003 to 2006. Of the 31 participants who graduated from high school in 2007, 24 (77.4%) enrolled in college. The universities and colleges include:

University of Missouri (1)	Moberly Area Community College (2)	University of Missouri - Kansas City (1)
Lincoln University (4)	Missouri Southern University (1)	Harris Stowe State University (3)
St. Louis University (1)	University of Arkansas – Pine Bluff (1)	Morehouse College (1)
Howard University (1)	State Fair Community College (1)	Fontbonne University (1)
Kansas City Kansas Community College (1)	Pinnacle Career Institute (1)	Washburn University (1)
Longview Metropolitan Community College (1)	Donnelly College (1)	Avila University (1)

Post-secondary activity of the remaining seven participants slated to graduate from high school in 2007 is as follows: four (13%) dropped out of the program, two (6.4%) are stay at home mothers, and one (3.2%) is working.

Overall Program Status - 2002-2007

Since the inception of Youth Futures 210 youth (duplicates removed) have participated in the program (41 youth in 2002; 61 in 2003; and 57 in 2004; 48 in 2005; 47 in 2006; 57 in 2007).

Where Are They Now?

One hundred and eighteen participants are currently in high school. Of the 92 participants scheduled to graduate from high school from 2002 to 2006:

- 13 (14%) have graduated from college
- 42 (46%) are currently college sophomores, juniors or seniors
- 8 (9%) entered but later dropped out of college
- 2 (2%) joined the military after high school graduation
- 12 (13%) are working
- 10 (11 %) were unable to be located or dropped out of the program
- 5 (5%) moved to another state.

In spring 2007, focus group research was conducted with a small (n=5) sample of Youth Futures graduates enrolled at two institutions. Students reported that the relationship with their Youth Futures mentor was a critical factor in their success in college with mentors viewed as a primary source of social support. Students reported that the program met tangible needs that their families couldn't meet. One participant talked specifically about how she couldn't afford to take ACT preparation courses at her high schools; however, Youth Futures gave her that opportunity. Other benefits identified were the formation of friendships and social support networks, having someone on campus that they knew, and workshops designed to help with transition into college life.

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.

2007 Financial Support

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2007 Program/Inkind Support

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Practical Parenting Partnerships

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Visit the Youth Futures website
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