

4-H Youth Futures College Within Reach

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

2008 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, promotes college as an obtainable goal for high school youth who are not typically encouraged to attend college, such as first-generation college students. 4-H Youth Futures is an extensive college orientation program that includes on-going local mentoring and a college orientation conference on the University of Missouri (MU) and Lincoln University (LU) campuses. The goal of the program is to help youth go to college and stay in college.

Youth Futures participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2008 began the program as freshmen, sophomores and juniors from 2004 to 2007. Of the 33 participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2008, 25 (76%) enrolled in college. The status of the remaining eight participants is as follows: four (12%) dropped out of high school and/or out of the program, two (6%) entered the workforce, one (3%) moved out of state, and one (3%) joined the military.

Since the inception of Youth Futures 242 youth (duplicates removed) have participated in the program (41 youth in 2002; 61 in 2003; 57 in 2004; 48 in 2005; 47 in 2006; 57 in 2007; and 58 in 2008). These numbers represent total participants each year and reflect duplicate youth. The same youth may participate in the program multiple years.

Ninety-two participants are currently in high school. Of the 123 participants scheduled to graduate from high school from 2002 to 2007:

- 16 (13%) have graduated from college
- 64 (52%) are currently college sophomores, juniors or seniors
- 10 (8%) entered but later dropped out of college
- 2 (2%) joined the military
- 11 (9%) entered the work force
- 15 (12%) were unable to be located or dropped out of the program
- 5 (4%) moved to another state.

4-H Youth Futures helps make college an achievable goal for non-traditional students. 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.

Introduction - Non-traditional College Students

Colleges and universities are increasing their efforts to recruit and retain non-traditional audiences such as first-generation college students, ethnic minority groups, and students from working-class families. Many non-traditional students, though, are less prepared for college – academically, psychologically and financially – than students who come from college-educated families (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pascarella, 2004).

Tinto (1993) 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.

A challenge confronting some non-traditional students is parent lack of first-hand knowledge of the college experience. Some parents may be unable to help them directly with college tasks (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005).

Non-traditional students may also lack important “college survival” skills in time management, budgeting, and interacting with large educational bureaucracies (Vargas, 2004). 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 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 college 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).

Mentoring programs also have a positive impact on college student success. Mentors can provide academic assistance, encouragement, and guidance about college. By helping students and their families learn about the college enrollment process (i.e., college and financial aid application, SAT/ACT test, housing, course selection and more) mentors serve as a vital link to college student success (Freedman, 1996).

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 on-going local mentoring and a college orientation conference on the MU and LU campuses. 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).

Mentoring

LU and MU Extension/4-H 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.).

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.

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. 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.

2008 Program Outcomes

Demographic Information

The sixth annual conference was held July 28 – 31, 2008 on the MU and LU campuses. Fifty-eight youth from Kansas City, St. Louis, Jefferson City, and Columbia participated in ongoing local mentoring programs and attended the conference. Of these, 39 (67%) are female and 19 (33%) are male. The mean age is 15.83 years (age range 13-19).

Racial/ethnic data:

- 54 (93%) - African American
- 2 (3%) - Caucasian
- 1 (2%) – Hispanic/Latino
- 1 (2%) - Bosnian

Family structure data:

- 23 (40%) live in a two-parent household
- 22 (38%) live in single-parent households
- 13 (22%) live with relatives or foster families

Short-Term Outcomes

Before the conference 21 (36%) youth reported uncertainty about going to college. These attitudes changed after the conference because 57 (98%) participants reported that they believe they can go to college and now plan to do so. Participants reported learning:

- “How to speak to people, save money, and the things you need to do in order to get ready for college.”
- “Never doubt yourself and go with what you believe in.”
- “More ways to pay for college, how to make a college action plan, and time management.”
- “How to be prepared, time management, and financial aid.”
- “How to prepare for ACT test, select colleges, and manage your money.”
- “How to interact with others, how to act in college, and all of the opportunities that are available to me.”
- “I can make the right things happen, get money, and I can go to college.”

Participants reported that they learned what they need to do to go to college (95%), where to find financial assistance for college (90%), and who to consult for help regarding college (93%). In addition, 98% of youth said that they now have a better understanding of college.

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

- “I would like to thank you for giving me a chance to be part of Youth Futures. I love how you think of the children in need and much more. I am now a student in college and I look forward to going far because of you.”
- “I would like to thank everyone who dedicated their time and money for us.”
- “My interest in attending college is to make my life better, learn new things, and get a career because a career is better than a job any day.”
- “I am in Youth Futures because I want to score a high score on the ACT test and I want to get better study habits and a higher GPA.”
- “I am doing everything in my power to go to college. I want to go to college so I can have a good life and a career.”
- “My interest in college is high. I want to attend MU, KU or CMSU. Most likely MU. I want to attend college because I want to better my life. I need an education so I can go farther than a \$7 hour job.”

Intermediate Outcomes

2008 High School Graduates

Youth Futures participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2008 began the program as high school freshmen, sophomores and juniors from 2004 to 2007. Of the 33 participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2008, 25 (76%) enrolled in college. The universities and colleges include:

- Lincoln University (3)
- Missouri Western State University (3)
- Penn Valley Community College (3)
- University of Missouri – Kansas City (2)
- University of Missouri (1)
- Harris Stowe State University (1)
- Central Missouri State University (1)
- Moberly Area Community College (1)
- Missouri Southern University (1)
- California Art Institute (1)
- Columbia College – Chicago (1)
- Illinois Central College (1)
- Allen Community College (1)
- Maplewood Community College (1)
- Benedictine College (1)
- Longview Community College (1)
- Donnelly College (1)
- Forrest Park Community College (1)

The status of the remaining eight participants is as follows: four (12%) dropped out of high school and/or out of the program, two (6%) entered the workforce, one (3%) moved out of state, and one (3%) joined the military.

Overall Program Status - 2002-2008 Since the inception of Youth Futures, 242 youth (duplicates removed) have participated in the program (41 youth in 2002; 61 in 2003; 57 in 2004; 48 in 2005; 47 in 2006; 57 in 2007; and 58 in 2008). These numbers represent total participants each year and reflect duplicate youth. The same youth may participate in the program multiple years.

Where Are They Now?

Ninety-two participants are currently in high school. Of the 123 participants scheduled to graduate from high school from 2002 to 2007:

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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 achieving success in college.

2008 Financial Support

4-H Center for Youth Development
Missouri 4-H Foundation
MU Vice Provost for Extension
MU Chancellor's Diversity Initiative
Lincoln University

2008 Program/In-kind Support

Missouri Employers Mutual Insurance Company

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

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