

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

2012 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 attainable 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 underserved youth go to college and stay in college.

Youth Futures participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2012 began the program as high school freshmen, sophomores and juniors from 2008 to 2011. Of the 44 participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2012, 34 (77%) enrolled in college. The status of the remaining 10 participants (23%) is as follows: 6 (14%) entered the workforce, 3 (7%) dropped out of the program and one (2%) entered the military (navy).

Since the inception of Youth Futures, 469 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; 58 in 2008; 59 in 2009; 87 in 2010; 92 in 2011; and 74 in 2012). These numbers represent total participants each year and reflect duplicate youth. The same youth may participate in the program multiple years.

One hundred and twenty-eight participants are currently in high school. Of the 297 participants scheduled to graduate from high school from 2002 to 2011:

- 80 (27%) have graduated from college
- 112 (38%) are currently college sophomores, juniors or seniors
- 45 (15%) entered the work force
- 37 (12%) were unable to be located or dropped out of the program
- 18 (6%) entered but later dropped out of college
- 5 (2%) joined the military after high school graduation

Total 297 (100%)

4-H Youth Futures helps make college an achievable goal for underserved youth. 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 - Underserved College Youth

Colleges and universities are increasing their efforts to recruit and retain underserved audiences such as first-generation college students, ethnic minority groups, and students from working-class families. Many underserved youth, though, are less prepared for college – academically, psychologically and financially – than those 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 youth are two times as likely as those with a parent with a college degree to leave before their second year (Choy, 2001). But many underserved youth must overcome additional obstacles on the path to a college degree.

A challenge confronting some underserved youth 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).

Underserved youth 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 youth 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 Underserved Youth

One of the most popular methods to help all youth make a smooth transition to college is an orientation course. Orientation programs vary from school to school, but all are designed to introduce youth 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 underserved youth 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, Sikeston 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.

2012 Program Outcomes

Demographic Information

The tenth annual conference was held July 23 – 26, 2012 on the MU campus. Seventy-four youth from Kansas City, St. Louis, Jefferson City, Columbia, and Sikeston participated in ongoing local mentoring programs and attended the conference. Sixty-seven youth completed demographic data as follows. Of 67 youth, 51 (69%) are female and 23 (31%) are male. The mean age is 15.77 years (age range 13-18).

Racial/ethnic data:

- 50 (75%) - African American
- 12 (18%) – Hispanic/Latino
- 4 (6%) - Caucasian
- 1 (1%) - Bosnian

Family structure data:

- 29 (43%) live in a two-parent household
- 28 (42%) live in single-parent households
- 10 (15%) live with relatives or foster families

Short-Term Outcomes

Before the conference 20 (30%) youth reported uncertainty about going to college. These attitudes changed after the conference because 66 (99%) participants reported that they believe they can go to college and now plan to do so. Participants reported learning about:

- Cost of college, study tactics, ACT and SAT scores
- You can't give up, hang with the right people, be confident
- That college is more than parties, it requires work
- Time management, cost reality, FAFSA
- FAFSA, student loans, and how to obtain scholarships
- How you can major in more than one area, process for college, how to spend your money wisely
- Things that would be helpful in interviews, how to plan ahead for college, and what to do in high school for college
- How much ACT scores matter, how to manage time in college, how to work with others better
- No matter where you come from you can still go to college, time management, deadline for scholarships

Participants reported that they learned what they need to do to go to college (n=64 or 96%), where to find financial assistance for college (n = 58 or 86%), and who to consult for help regarding college (n = 62 or 93%). In addition, 97% (n = 65) of youth said that they now have a better understanding of college.

Quotes from participants about how the program and mentors inspired them:

- I just wanted to let you know that I'm about to finish my first semester of college :) I'm looking at scholarships right now for my fall semester and for my further education..... I would love to thank you and all your staff from ... Youth Futures and The University of Missouri Extension Program and all great people that were in or helped out with the program for teaching me and showing me that if you really work hard and you push yourself to the limits on trying to achieve your goals in life, you can reach them no matter what the obstacles or bumps lie ahead of you. I would love to thank all of you in person or even see everyone once again soon so I can thank them. I now know that without you I would have never thought to go to school or to at least further my education with just a little bit. I thank you for giving that chance and the hope that you two have always given me to show and give all that is me to further my education not just for me and my future, but also for my family. I would love to see you soon maybe we can meet soon? I hope to hear from you soon and I also hope that we can meet each other soon.
- The programs most beneficiary to me were the ones that helped mold my future. Last year we got the opportunity to connect with the 4-H program which created my favorite memories. We got the opportunity to go on a College tour to HBCU's such as Fisk, TSU, and Alabama A&M. I was also able to meet and connect with peers my age wanting to achieve my similar goals.
- The 4-H program afforded me the opportunity to visit several colleges including Historically Black Colleges and Universities. I also participated in the Youth Future's Conference which gave valuable information about college and the importance of presenting yourself in a professional manner.

Intermediate Outcomes

2012 High School Graduates

Youth Futures participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2012 began the program as high school freshmen, sophomores and juniors from 2008 to 2011. Of the 44 participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2012, 34 (77%) enrolled in higher education institutions. The universities and colleges include:

- Meramec Community College
- University of Missouri
- Milikin University
- Maple Woods Community College
- John Wood Community College – Quincy, IL
- University of Missouri - Kansas City (2)

- Moberly Area Community College
- North Carolina A&T
- Berklee College of Music – Boston, MA
- Vatterott College (2)
- Donnelly College (4)
- Cordon Blue Culinary School
- Missouri State University
- Southeast Missouri State University (2)
- Missouri Valley College
- Salt Lake City Community College
- Austin Texas Community College
- University of Missouri - St. Louis (3)
- Clark University - Atlanta, GA
- Central Missouri State University
- Truman University
- Forrest Park Community College (2)
- University of Arkansas
- Langston University
- Florissant Valley Community College

The status of the remaining 10 participants (23%) is as follows: 6 (14%) entered the workforce, 3 (7%) dropped out of the program and 1 (2%) entered the military (navy).

Overall Program Status - 2002-2012 Since the inception of Youth Futures, 469 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; 58 in 2008; 59 in 2009; 87 in 2010; 92 in 2011; and 74 in 2012). 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?

One hundred and twenty-eight participants are currently in high school. Of the 297 participants scheduled to graduate from high school from 2002 to 2011:

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Total 297 (100%)

The overall retention/graduation rate is 65% (n=192)

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.

2012 Financial Support

Missouri Department of Higher Education
4-H Center for Youth Development
Missouri 4-H Foundation
MU Vice Provost for Extension
MU Chancellor's Diversity Initiative

2012 Program/In-kind Support

Missouri Employers Mutual Insurance Company

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

Alison Copeland
State 4-H Youth Development Specialist
4-H Center for Youth Development
1110 S. College Ave., Room 105
Columbia, MO 65211
Phone: 573/882-8807
Fax: 573/884-4225
Email: copelanda@missouri.edu

Visit the Youth Futures website
www.4h.missouri.edu/go/youthfutures

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