

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

2014 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 graduate from college.

Youth Futures participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2014 began the program as high school freshmen, sophomores and juniors from 2009 to 2013. Of the 30 participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2014, 21 (70%) enrolled in higher education institutions. The status of the remaining 9 participants (30%) is as follows: 4 (13%) entered the workforce, 4 (13%) dropped out of the program and one (4%) entered the military.

Since the inception of Youth Futures in 2002, 550 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; 74 in 2012; 74 in 2013; and 93 in 2014). These numbers represent total participants who participate in the full program (local mentoring and conferences) each year and reflect duplicate youth. The same youth may participate in the program multiple years.

Where Are They Now?

One hundred and thirty (130) participants are currently in high school. Of the 390 participants scheduled to graduate from high school from 2002 to 2013:

- 128 (33%) have graduated from college (one since deceased)
- 121 (30%) are currently college sophomores, juniors or seniors (one deceased)
- 55 (14%) entered the work force
- 38 (10%) were unable to be located or dropped out of the program
- 38 (10%) entered but later dropped out of college
- 10 (3%) entered the military

Total 390 (100%)

The overall college retention/graduation rate is 63% (n = 249)

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 (Fleming, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pascarella, 2004).

Tinto (2012) 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 (Perna & Kurban, 2013). 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 (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins (2012).

Underserved youth may also lack important “college survival” skills in time management, budgeting, and interacting with large educational bureaucracies (Anyon, 2009; Fleming, 2012). 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 (Braxton, Doyle, Hartley, Hirschy, Jones, & McLendon, M., 2013; 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 (Braxton et al, 2013; 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, Hillsboro, Poplar Bluff 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. Other conferences that meet the needs of targeted age groups include the Rising Seniors Weekend (participants going into their senior year of high school), Transitioning Seniors Weekend (12th graders going into college), Tween Weekend (7th and 8th grade participants).

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.

2014 Program Outcomes

Demographic Information

The thirteenth annual conference was held July 18 – 24, 2014 on the MU campus. Ninety-three youth from Kansas City, St. Louis, Jefferson City, Columbia, Sedalia, Hillsboro, Poplar Bluff and Sikeston participated in ongoing local mentoring programs and attended the conference. Eighty-six youth completed demographic data as follows. Of 86 youth, 47 (55%) are female and 39 (45%) are male. The mean age is 15.31 years (age range 13-19).

Racial/ethnic data:

- 66 (77%) - African American
- 16 (19%) – Hispanic/Latino
- 3 (3%) - Caucasian
- 1 (1%) - Asian

Family structure data:

- 29 (34%) live in a two-parent household
- 37 (43%) live in single-parent households
- 20 (23%) live with relatives or foster families

Short-Term Outcomes

Before participating in Youth Futures 38 (44%) youth reported uncertainty about going to college. These attitudes changed after the program because 84 (98%) participants reported that they believe they can go to college and now plan to do so. Participants reported learning:

- Time management, interview skills, and how to apply to college.
- College affordability, college life and how to do better on ACT
- How to prepare myself for college, and what I need to do as far as my grades for college
- Scholarships, life on campus, and what the ACT is
- Help is available, there are different types of colleges, I can go attend a HBCU or a regular college
- Everyone is different, college is good and I know how to prepare myself for college
- FASFA, ACT, and types of scholarships
- How many actual hours make up a full time student, about scholarships and to project my voice

Participants reported that they learned what they need to do to go to college (n = 81 or 94%), where to find financial assistance for college (n = 75 or 87%), and who to consult for help regarding college (n = 80 or 93%). In addition, 97% (n = 83) of youth said that they now have a better understanding of college.

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

- Youth Futures is the reason I am in college today. I don't know where I would have been without Youth Futures. I just would not have known what to do or who I could be today.

- I learned how to become a better student, not to give up in life and to take my education seriously.
- I learned how to enroll into college, study habits, how to manage my money, and choosing the best college for myself.

Intermediate Outcomes

2014 High School Graduates

Youth Futures participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2014 began the program as high school freshmen, sophomores and juniors from 2010 to 2013. Of the 30 participants scheduled to graduate from high school in 2014, 21 (70%) enrolled in higher education institutions. The universities and colleges include:

- Warburg College – Iowa
- Art Institute of Atlanta
- Baccone College – Oklahoma
- Prairie View University – Texas
- Howard University – Washington D.C.
- Penn Valley Community College
- Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts
- Kansas State University
- University of Missouri (2)
- Harris Stowe University (2)
- University of Missouri Kansas City
- Missouri State University
- Southeast Missouri State University
- Three Rivers Community College (2)
- Ball State University
- University of Kansas
- St. Louis Community College

The status of the remaining 9 participants (30%) is as follows: 4 (13%) entered the workforce, 4 (13%) dropped out of the program and one (4%) entered the military.

Overall Program Status - 2002-2014 Since the inception of Youth Futures, 550 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; 74 in 2012; 74 in 2013; and 93 in 2014). These numbers represent total participants who participate in the full program (local mentoring and conferences) each year and reflect duplicate youth. The same youth may participate in the program multiple years.

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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.

2014 Financial Support

MU Vice Provost for Extension
 4-H Center for Youth Development
 Missouri 4-H Foundation

2014 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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Visit the Youth Futures website
www.4h.missouri.edu/go/youthfutures

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