



# FOSTER CARE ALUMNI ATTENDING COLLEGE

## PERCEPTIONS OF CAMPUS-BASED SUPPORT SERVICES

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### Rationale

Former foster youth (foster care alumni, FCA) face a unique set of challenges as they navigate post-secondary education. College graduation rates for FCA are extremely low (between 3-11% nationwide). There is a lack of evidence-based assessment and support for campus-based support programs designed specifically for FCA.

### Research Questions

- Are FCA at two and four-year post-secondary institutions aware of the campus-based support services available to them?
- How do FCA perceive campus-based support services?
- What are the lived experiences of FCA as they access campus-based support services?

### Research Tradition & Paradigm

Phenomenology was used to explore the lived experiences of FCA navigating college campus resources in two-year and four-year post-secondary settings. The phenomenological approach provided researchers with a new lens to examine attitudes and perceptions of campus-based support services as they are experienced by FCA. The intention of using the research of tradition of phenomenology was to bolster understanding of the current experiences of FCA, and to build a strengths-based foundation for future research and potential program development.

"You're gonna have to grow up fast, but that's OK because you're going to be more prepared than your friends or people around you. You're going to be able to deal with problems that they haven't dealt with yet."  
-P1

## Data Sources

- Due to difficulty in identifying participants, only one interview was conducted with a student who identified as a FCA
- The participant participated in an individual, semi-structured interview
- The interview lasted approximately one hour
- The interview protocol guided participant to share their experiences attending college
- Focused on: transition to college, lived experiences attending college, experiences with on-campus support and resources, and recommendations for the participant's institution

## Themes & Subthemes

- Transition to College: Academic challenge, Self-efficacy
- Perceptions of Campus-Based Support Services: Participants perceive programs as supportive, inaccessible, or inhibitive factors contributing to their college experiences as FCA
- Challenges to Academic Success: Financial support, Housing, Stress
- Group Identity: Participant's awareness of intersecting identities as FCA, first-generation college student, & racial/ethnic minority at a predominantly white institution (PWI)

## Results & Implications

- Positive descriptions of campus-based support services were connected with positive relationships with student services staff members (primarily counselors and advisors)
- Certain campus-based support services are perceived as inaccessible or inhibitive by FCA due to their inability to meet unique needs of FCA: such as housing over breaks/holidays, and inclusive language that accounts for lack of parents/guardians during orientation programming
- Participant described delayed awareness of support programs and experienced significant challenges regarding financial support/food security at the start of college experience
- Participant highlighted the importance of finding a community on campus with others who share similar identities (first-generation, racial/ethnic group, etc.) in order to develop a support system
- Participant expressed interest in finding such a community for FCA attending university
- Implications for the university in acknowledging and proactively supporting FCA on campus
- As I continue this study, I hope to expand the pool of interviewees to gain more breadth and depth into the perspectives and experiences of FCA attending post-secondary institutions.



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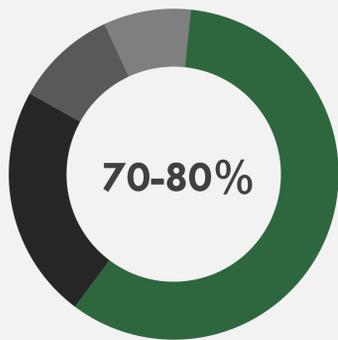
## ONLINE RESOURCES LIST

- **For Student Affairs Professionals:**

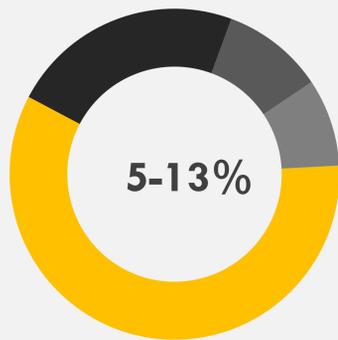
- California AB 12 Fact Sheet
- <http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/res/pdf/AB12FactSheet.pdf>
- California Foster Care Education Law Fact Sheets (P. 29-30)
- [http://www.cfyetf.org/publications\\_19\\_421458854.pdf](http://www.cfyetf.org/publications_19_421458854.pdf)
- Fostering Success Coach Training:
- <https://wmich.edu/fosteringSUCCESS/outreach/training>

- **For Foster Care Alumni Attending College:**

- California College Pathways  
<http://www.cacollegepathways.org/>
- Foster Care Transition Toolkit:  
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/youth-transition-toolkit.pdf>
- Foster Youth Educational Planning Guide  
[www.ilponline.org/Documents/Foster%20Youth%20Educational%20Planning%20Guide.pdf](http://www.ilponline.org/Documents/Foster%20Youth%20Educational%20Planning%20Guide.pdf)
- Federal Student Aid Prepare for College Checklist  
<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/prepare-for-college/checklists>
- Foster Club Transition Toolkit  
<https://store.fosterclub.com/transition-toolkit-download/>
- Foster Club All-Star Internship  
<https://store.fosterclub.com/transition-toolkit-download/>
- Seita Scholars Program  
<https://wmich.edu/fosteringSUCCESS/seita>



Percentage of foster youth who report having college aspirations after high school\*



Of the 6% of youth who age out of the system every year, percentage of foster youth who enroll in higher education\*



**Graduation Rate for FCA:**  
2-3% Nationwide\*

# Foster Care Alumni Attending College

Perceptions of Campus-Based Support Services

## RESEARCH THEMES:

Transition to University  
Student Services  
Personal Factors

### Transition to University



*“Don’t compare yourself to other people. And if you are, use that as motivation...Don’t think that you’re not good enough just because you don’t have parents.”*

**Subthemes:**  
Summer Institute/EOP  
Academic Challenge  
Beliefs of Self-Efficacy  
Financial Support/Housing

**Subthemes:**  
School Staff  
Supportive  
Inhibitive  
Inaccessible



### Student Services

*“They’re able to point me in the right direction every single time, every question I have. If they don’t know the answer, they’ll show me someone who knows the answer.”*

### Personal Factors



*I’m tired. I’m hungry. I’m stressed. I’ve got homework. I like that because that’s better than any other stress I’ve ever dealt with. That’s what college is all about.”*

**Subthemes:**  
Stress  
Depression  
Family  
Group Identity