**Assessing the Relationship between Education and Training**

**Voucher (ETV) Receipt and Postsecondary Educational Attainment**

**Proposal**

**Background**

A significant gap in postsecondary educational attainment exists between former foster youth and their non-foster care peers. Not only are young people who had been in foster care less likely to attend college than their peers (Brandford and English 2004; Wolanin 2005; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Taylor and Nesmith 2001; Courtney et al. 2007), but in addition, those who do attend college are less likely than their peers to earn a degree (Day et al. 2011; Courtney et al. 2010; Davis 2006).

This gap in educational attainment is important because changes in the U.S. economy have made the attainment of a higher education credential more important than ever to ensure self-sufficiency. However, researchers have only recently begun to explore why comparatively few foster care alumni who attend college persist until degree completion (Merdinger et al. 2005). Foster care alumni are often not academically ready for college, and must take remedial courses in their freshmen year. In addition, student service personnel at colleges receive little training on how to appropriately serve foster youth.

For youth in foster care, the pathway through college is usually marked by interruptions due to transfers from community colleges to four year universities and withdrawals from college due to lack of financial resources to pay for college.

Over the past few decades, federal policies have attempted to increase access to college among youth in foster care primarily by removing economic barriers to postsecondary education. Most notably, in 2001, Congress added the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program, the first federal program created specifically to address the postsecondary educational needs of this population, as an amendment to the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. States can use their ETV funds to provide current and former foster youth with up to $5,000 per year for postsecondary training and education. Youth receiving ETV funds on their 21st birthday remain eligible until age 23, as long as they are making satisfactory progress toward completion of their education or vocational training program. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 expanded eligibility for the ETV program to youth who are at least 16 years old when they achieve permanency through adoption or subsidized guardianship.

Typically, however, mechanisms have not been developed to facilitate communication between educational institutions and child welfare agencies in a manner that allows proactive encouragement of students to apply for and use ETV resources. In addition, 22 states have tuition waiver programs that allow foster youth to receive a college education at no cost to the student. Further, little is known about the extent to which foster care alumni access ETV or tuition waiver programs or the effects of ETV receipt and tuition waiver receipt on persistence or graduation.

**The Multistate ETV Project**

This project will allow multiple states to track and verify whether students who have received ETV or tuition waivers have been able to successfully enroll and graduate from college. Data will be available for all students who have enrolled in a two year or four public university nationwide.

**Primary Research Questions**:

* What percentage of the young people who age out of foster care enroll in a postsecondary educational program?
* What percentage of the young people who enroll in a postsecondary educational program apply for an ETV?
* What percentage of the young people who enroll in a postsecondary educational program receive an ETV?
* Is there a difference in persistence between young people who receive an ETV and young people who do not? (Will we see a pattern of dropping out for students who become ineligible for ETV in the middle of their college journey?)
* Is there a difference in graduation rates between young people who receive an ETV and young people who do not?
* Does the amount of semesters in which ETV was received predict graduation rates?

Objectives:

* Analyze data to address primary research questions
* Discuss the policy and practice implications of the results
* Disseminate the findings through reports, policy briefs, peer reviewed articles in

academic journals, and presentations at professional conferences.

**Approach to Collect Data**

* Obtain data on college enrollment and graduation from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) for youth who aged out of care between 2001 and 2012 (or whichever date is earliest that the states have information on students receiving ETV or tuition waivers).

**State Participants**

* Michigan Department of Human Services,
* NJ Foster Care Scholars Program and
* Arizona Children’s Association, which administers the ETV program in Arizona.

**Statewide Data Necessary for the Project**

Each State would need to provide the following data regarding the students who have received ETV or a tuition waiver/state scholarship program. If the state has a tuition waiver or state scholarship program, then the state should distinguish which students have received which program.

* The student’s full name,
* Student’s Date of birth
* The dates that the student received ETV or the tuition waiver.
* The states can choose to send this directly to the National Student Clearinghouse.
* The clearinghouse will then provide the deidentified information back to the researchers to analyze the data.

**The Data Matching Process**

The Student’s name and date of birth will then be matched with the National Student Clearinghouse for youth who aged out of care between 2002 and 2012. (The project would control for each state’s first year of implementation of the ETV program. For example, in Michigan, ETV awards were not provided prior to 2004).

The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) captures data for all students who enroll in a public college, transfer and tracks students through college graduation.  The database will capture information for students enrolled at any public college or university (either 2yr or 4yr.) regardless of the student’s state of origin. One limitation is that some private colleges do not report their enrollment or graduation data to NSC. All colleges that participate in degree verify can provide information on student’s graduation receipts.

Our goal is to have information regarding ETV recipients from various states in order to secure funding from a national foundation. The funding would cover the expenses for the state/county staff to pull the ETV data information, the cost of using the NSC database, and the expenses for two doctoral students to analyze the data and produce a final report and journal articles describing the effects of ETV awards on the postsecondary attainment of youth in care.

***Proposed Findings will be:***

* Determine the number of youth who receive an ETV
* Determine the number of semesters in which youth receive an ETV
* Determine the number of semesters of study youth complete
* Determine the number of youth who receive a postsecondary credential, a 2 year or a 4 year college degree.
* Determine the number of semesters needed to receive the postsecondary degree.

**State Benefits to Participating in this Project**

This multistate proposal will provide for the first time a national perspective on ETV and tuition waiver receipt among foster care youth. Also, by using the NSC data, you capture colleges outside of the students’ state, thus allowing states to know if students that received ETV have graduated from a college out of state. The expected findings listed below will allow the state to have a better understanding of how many students in care have been able to earn a postsecondary degree due to their ETV or tuition waiver receipt. In addition, the data may also indicate which students have enrolled in postsecondary education, but who may not have graduated from the program. This will allow the state to see if further research is needed as to how to best provide supportive services to students who are enrolled in postsecondary education. This project will also allow states for the first time to have a record of how many students who have received ETV or tuition waivers have enrolled in college. The data will also show the student’s majors and the type of university where the student is enrolled. The state can then use this data to disseminate to its state legislators and state child welfare agency regarding the benefits of the ETV and tuition waiver program.