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Supporting the Dream: How California Community Colleges Are Responding to the Needs of

Foster Youth on Their Campuses

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Laura Beatriz Cantú

2014

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Supporting the Dream: How California Community Colleges Are Responding to the Needs of  
Foster Youth on Their Campuses

by

Laura Beatriz Cantú

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Richard Wagoner, Co-Chair

Professor Linda Rose, Co-Chair

This dissertation closely examines the experience of foster youth attending California community colleges and how campuses are responding to their educational needs. Foster youth have the least successful educational outcomes of any population of young Americans. They also represent one of the most vulnerable and academically at-risk populations in the nation. This lack of success is due to many factors, not the least of which is the instability and discontinuity encountered by changing schools frequently due to placement changes. But while this instability greatly impacts their academic preparation and achievement, other obstacles further impede their educational success. This dissertation looked at how three Los Angeles County community

colleges, in particular, were responding to these obstacles and the needs of foster youth attending their campuses.

The study design utilized a qualitative method, specifically case study methodology. This method was employed because there is little research done in this area. The case study of the three programs working with foster youth assisted in the understanding of the complexity of this issue within the context of each campus and allowed the researcher to build upon the limited body of knowledge with the hope of strengthening current programs. The data consisted of individual interviews, observations, review of primary program documents and a background questionnaire. The individual interviews were conducted with both student and staff. A total of thirty-two students and nine staff were interviewed across the three campuses.

The data collected was used to generate themes that helped to answer the research questions posed for this study. The research and findings identified the experience of foster youth and the types of support they stated were needed while attending community college in order to meet their educational objectives. The findings will be important in assisting child welfare and post-secondary institutions identify the supports needed to help foster youth become college and career ready in order to meet their post-secondary educational goals.

*Keywords:* Foster Youth, Foster Care, Educational Needs, Post-Secondary Education, Community College, College Access, Transitional Programs, Student Support, Student Success, Underrepresented Students

The dissertation of Laura Cantú is approved.

Alfreda Iglehart

Linda Rose, Committee Co-Chair

Richard Wagoner, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

## DEDICATION

Esta disertación es dedicada a mis antepasados y guías protectores. En especial a mis abuelitas Guadalupe González De Loza y Enedina Aurora Flores Carrillo que siempre me enseñaron a luchar por mis sueños a través de hacerme ver mi fuerza interior y de hacerme tener fe de que yo soy capaz de lograr todo que me propongo hacer. La dedico también a mi abuelito Celestino Flores que nunca dudó de mi potencial y que siempre me decía: “Sigue tus estudios... la vida te puede quitar muchas cosas, pero no puede quitar lo que has aprendido”. Sus palabras me dieron el valor para luchar por mi educación y enfrentar cualquier obstáculo. Como me gustaría poder decirles que toda la enseñanza y los ejemplos de vida que ustedes me dieron, me ayudaron a ser la mujer que soy hoy en día. Aunque no estén aquí conmigo, yo siento la presencia de ustedes a mi alrededor dándome la fuerza para seguir luchando. También dedico esta disertación a Sara Kali, María Yemala, Manuela, Ana María Cortez y Camila que me guiaron y que nunca me dejaron sola en los momentos más difíciles de esta jornada. Les doy las gracias por los mensajes y valiosos consejos.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother; Beatriz Flores Carrillo for believing, supporting and always encouraging me to continue even when I didn't think this was possible. Your unconditional love and belief in me was the one thing that helped me persevere. This degree represents all of the prayers, dedication and love you have given me and I am forever grateful to have you by my side. This accomplishment is for both of us and I will love you for all eternity.

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*“Where there is life, there is always hope”* Yoruba Proverb

*“We live by hope, but a reed never becomes an Iroko tree by dreaming”* Yoruba Proverb

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## VITA

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Turning 18 years of age is an exciting turning point for young adults throughout the nation. It signals a time of independence and opportunity for young adults to delve into the world of college and career. This age is usually an exciting time in a person's life; however, this is not the case for all young people. For emancipating foster youth this transition to adulthood entails a period of duress when they must rush to decide on the path of their future (Collins, 2001; Courtney, 2001). Emancipating foster youth must figure out where they are going to live and how they are going to support themselves; they are concerned with these circumstances as opposed to thinking about the excitement of moving out of the parental nest, enrolling in college, as well as choosing a major and career.

The transition from high school to post-secondary education can present a time of confusion for many students. This confusion is exacerbated for foster youth. Having not been prepared for enrolling in or attending college, most foster youth are overwhelmed by the basics of the higher learning process (Casey Family Programs, 2010). They struggle with the submission of both college and financial aid applications. How can foster youth be supported so that they may handle these practical issues and, thereby, better focus on the actual substance of a college education?

The issues at hand pose a burden particularly on former foster youth who are "aged-out" of the foster care system. The term "aged-out" refers to a person who has reached the age of 18, is no longer a ward of the court, has never found a permanent placement, and was never adopted.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, there are over 500,000 youth in foster care in any given year. In California, 80,000 youth are in foster care and of that group, it is estimated that close to 40,000 reside in Los Angeles County, with close to 2,000 “aging-out” of the system each year. This subgroup of foster youth represents one of the most vulnerable populations because they leave the system on their own without any parental or familial financial or emotional support. While former foster youth are eligible for Independent Living Skills (ILP) assistance, it is not comparable to a supportive nurturing relationship that they can rely on for support in case of emergencies.

Foster youth who “age-out” of care do not have the parental or social support to assist them during difficult times. Often this lack of support causes foster youth to spiral downward during times of crisis. It is during these periods of crisis that youth drop out of school. This lack of parental or social support system is a significant distinction of foster youth. Most 18-year-olds who are in college can rely on their families for support. Even if a student comes from a low-income family, simply knowing that he or she is not alone to deal with the situation can be the determining factor in how the student adapts. During a preliminary interview, a former foster youth commented that three weeks before the end of the semester, he dropped out of community college because he lost his housing and did not have transportation to get to the campus (“Anonymous, 2008”). Without parents, role models, guidance counselors, or a social network in place manageable problems, for most people, become overwhelming and life changing experiences for former foster youth (Shirk & Stangler, 2004).

The state of California has the second highest number of youth in foster care.<sup>1</sup> California’s foster care population is second only to the state of New York. A disproportionate number of California’s foster youth reside in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. It is estimated

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<sup>1</sup> California’s foster care population is second only to the state of New York.

that Los Angeles County currently has 40,000 foster youth under jurisdiction of the dependency court, with approximately 2,000 youth “aging-out” of the system year each year. While the numbers reported are for the entire county, the city of Los Angeles is reported to have 48% of this entire population (Education Coordinating Council Report, 2006).

Due to these and rising numbers across the country, national policymakers and institutions are interested in what happens to foster youth once they have transitioned from care and how they access college and career opportunities (Casey Family & Annie, 2000). In recent years, child welfare advocates have begun to demand better educational outcomes for youth in the foster care system. Aside from this growing call to action, the numbers in Los Angeles alone support the need to understand what can be done to help connect foster youth to the opportunities that other youth their age are experiencing: college and career. The economic benefits of a college degree are significant and well documented; child welfare advocates understand this notion, and they will continue to demand for better educational outcomes including college degree attainment. However, very little is known about the experience of foster youth once they are in higher education. A study that focuses on understanding the experiences of foster youth in higher education will not only benefit future students but will also inform advocates, institutions, and educational leaders about the specific needs and challenges these students face.

### **Background Relating to the Problem**

Foster youth by far have the worst educational outcomes of any other population of youth. They represent one of the most vulnerable and academically at risk populations in the nation. Additionally, research shows that foster youth are more likely to be retained and placed in special education classes. Furthermore, they drop out of school at disproportionately high rates when compared to non-foster youth (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2004). The lack of success in

school is, in large part, due to the instability that foster youth experience: constantly pulled out of school, neglect and abuse that some have experienced, and suspensions that are brought on due to behavioral problems. However dismal, 46% of foster youth are graduating from high school with a diploma, and with proper guidance and support, these students can transition to post-secondary education (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2004).

According to Wolanin's report "Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth" (2005), there are close to 150,000 former foster youth who are currently eligible for post-secondary education (those that have HS diplomas), but there are close to 300,000 youth between the ages of 18-24 (college-age) who have already emancipated from care. These numbers represent the potential pool of college-age foster youth. While the exact number of foster youth enrolled in college is unknown, the following highlights the need to understand how many youth are currently enrolled in post-secondary institutions and what can be done to increase their degree attainment rates.

The Casey initiative has attempted to identify what happens to youth after they transition but those outcomes have become more difficult to track. What is known from studies they have conducted is that 46% of the foster youth population completes a high school diploma (compared to 80% of the general population). Because of low high school completion rates and lack of college preparation, a study looking at community college attendance can begin to identify how former foster youth are doing in meeting their post-secondary outcomes. The Casey initiative did find that 70% of teens who transition from the system indicate they want to attend college, but fewer than 10% of those who graduate from high school actually enroll in college and of those, 2% attain a degree. The benefit of studying foster youth who are currently attending community college can provide a roadmap to other former foster youth who had the desire to attend post-

secondary institutions but failed to enroll either after high school or after transitioning from the system.

A 2002 study by Joan Merdinger titled “Pathways to College,” focused on the psychosocial and system-related factors that contribute to college enrollment and attendance amongst former foster youth in California. Merdinger’s study found that at California community colleges success rates indicated that 2% of former foster youth successfully transferred to a four-year institution, 2% attained an Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree, and 1% received a workforce certificate (Merdinger & Tweed, 2002). Comparing these numbers to other non-traditional student populations indicates that these numbers are still disparate in comparison. The Merdinger study is the only one of its kind and is supported by other researchers who argue that the educational attainment rate of former foster youth is disproportionately low, especially when compared to the non-foster youth population (Davis, 2006).

At the third annual Creating a Blueprint Conference: Building Support for Students from Foster Care in Higher Education it was reported that in California close to 4,000 former foster youth are in higher education and of that number, 77% are attending community colleges and 23% are enrolled at four-year institutions (Leno, Nov 2007). These numbers highlight the importance of creating a study at the community college level and identifying how these campuses are responding to the needs of former foster youth as they work towards completing their degrees. These percentages are also significant because one system is seeing the majority of the former foster youth population and how this post-secondary system responds can determine if former foster youth will go on to earn A.A. degrees and transfer to four-year institutions.

Identifying the outcomes will help advocates and researchers identify what works, as well as the areas of opportunity that exist in helping youth meet their goals. The intention of Assembly Bill 2463, which California passed in 1995, was to require that all University of California (UCs), California State Universities (CSUs) and community colleges provide outreach and support services to students who have emancipated from foster care (former foster youth). Additionally, federal legislation such as the Foster Care Independence Act requires that emancipating foster youth be provided with the skills necessary to successfully transition to adulthood.

Clearly, the percentages show that the educational needs of foster youth are not being met. Currently, foster youth use the same programs, such as Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOP&S), which have assisted marginalized groups access post-secondary education. But foster youth are not targeted through these programs nor are the programs charged with specifically targeting foster youth. Researchers point out that foster youth follow the same path as first time low-income and minority students when it comes to accessing higher education, including programmatic support by the same support services (Wolanin, 2005). But unfortunately, these programs are not always equipped to deal with the unique issues and circumstances faced by foster youth. Further complicating the situation is the fact that independent living programs frequently are not effective in providing the skills needed to complete the college admissions and financial aid process (Wolanin, 2005).

In “Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth,” Wolanin (2005) argues there are six reasons why foster youth are not successful in higher education: (a) weak academic preparation, (b) lack of expectations from those around them and themselves, (c) lack of information about college, (d) lack of knowledge in order to navigate college application

process, (e) not enough financial aid or lack of information regarding aid, and (f) myths about college. While other at-risk student populations attending post-secondary institutions may encounter similar indicators, very little is known about the foster youth experience and how it can exacerbate these conditions.

Weak academic preparation is a reality amongst the foster youth population. But there are still 300,000 foster youth who have emancipated from care and are in need of educational and career preparation. This need can be met by community colleges throughout the nation. According to Grubb in “Using Community College to Re-Connect Disconnected Youth,” there are specific practices a campus can institute in order to meet the needs of these youth. Community colleges can strengthen academic preparation for former foster youth by implementing a bridge program that would help prepare youth who do not have the academic skills to be successful in college (Grubb, 2003).

When it comes to the information and knowledge about the college process, foster youth have had to rely on the system responsible for their care. According to Davis’s article “College Access, Financial Aid and College Success for Undergrads from Foster Care,” low-income minority students and foster youth face similar barriers. Both Wolanin and Davis agree that most college programs working with foster youth have traditionally been set up to work with minority and low income students, who may have a difficult time navigating college but who, at the very least, have some level of parental support. Foster youth, for the most part, will have a harder time because they have not received guidance from parents, guardians, school counselors, or social workers. Aside from the lack of guidance foster youth experience, there are other issues that impede their ability to gain access to higher education (Davis, 2006). Davis argues that very

little is known about foster youth experiences in higher education because there is little to no comparable data and information about foster youth in higher education.

California is one of few states that provide state financial aid for foster youth. Foster youth are provided with fee waivers at the community colleges in California and are eligible for additional funds. While there are resources, often, foster youth do not fill out FAFSA forms and other financial aid information in time. Specifically, it is not uncommon for foster youth to decide a few weeks before the start of the semester they will be attending college (Foster Youth Success Initiative Liaison Interview, 2008). This makes it difficult to access financial resources to get their school materials, primarily textbooks. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness of how to fill out the paperwork.

The California Community College Chancellors office has created an initiative called the Foster Youth Success Initiative. The goal is to have a liaison at each of the 110 campuses to help foster youth fill out all the proper financial aid applications and get connected to resources. While this is a great move forward, Davis argues that having the necessary financial aid resources is only the first step in ensuring success for foster youth in higher education. Davis attributed the lack of a structured support system(s) and points to the fact that other services are needed in order to help students meet their educational goals and achieve degrees.

But Davis also goes on to state that due to the lack of data, the primary reasons for not completing a degree program are unknown for more than three-fourths of all non-completing undergraduates from foster care. This makes it harder to understand the factors that impede foster youth from attaining a degree. Distinguishing what foster youth need to be successful in college has been left up to general research that identifies problems with access and problems

prior to college enrollment; very little is known once foster youth are enrolled at post-secondary institutions.

### **How to Study the Problem**

Little research has explored the experiences of foster youth attending community college campuses. Understanding how campuses are supporting foster youth in meeting their post-secondary degree goals, as well as understanding why campuses have selected the services that are offered in their program, will help additional colleges understand how to increase the post-secondary educational degree attainment of foster youth. For these reasons conducting in-depth case studies at the community college level will help to begin to understand the issues faced by students and by campus staff but will also provide much needed information to researchers, advocacy groups, and colleges about the needs of former foster youth at the post-secondary level.

With all these reasons in mind, it is best to design a study that will look at how community colleges are responding to the needs of former foster youth on their campuses. This data will help identify the essential components needed for a program that targets foster youth.

The research questions guiding my study are as follows:

1. How do California community colleges address the needs of foster youth enrolled on their campuses?
  - a. According to former foster youth, what are the challenges they face in accomplishing their educational goals at a community college? What are the differences, if any, in students' perceptions and staff's perceptions about these challenges?
  - b. What supports do foster youth see as having helped their educational progress, i.e., what things do they say have aided their transition to college and their

attainment of a degree What supports do foster youth say they needed but did not have?

- c. According to former foster youth, how knowledgeable are community college personnel regarding the types of support(s) they need to meet post-secondary educational goals? What are the differences, if any, in students' perceptions and staff's perceptions about the types of support(s) they need to meet post-secondary goals?
- d. How do foster youth describe their college life experience? How connected do foster youth feel toward their college, program personnel, peers, and services on their campus?

I will be doing a case study on three Los Angeles County community college campus programs. A case study methodology will help me understand the experiences of foster youth attending the community colleges participating in the study. This method will assist in identifying if there are connections between a specific program design and educational outcomes, as well as the similarities and differences between programs. More importantly, a case study will facilitate understanding an issue that is complex and uncharted. Another benefit of using a case study on three different campuses will be to highlight elements of a specific program that is currently taking place at specific campuses that may be having a positive impact on serving more foster youth.

In 2005, a few programs in California began on community college campuses. Some of these programs have been created with partnerships and by linking existing resources that were already housed on their campuses, where others identified outside resources to provide a program specifically targeted towards foster youth. While there may be similarities amongst

these programs, they all run differently. The Chancellor's office and community college personnel can learn from existing programs that are currently working with foster youth in achieving their academic goals.

### **Impact of the Study and Dissemination**

A study at community colleges is needed due to the sheer numbers of foster youth that are enrolled at these campuses. However, far more important is a study that will capture the experience of foster youth currently attending community colleges in Los Angeles. So much is unknown and many assumptions about their needs are made on a daily basis. A study of the experiences and identification of the needs of foster youth attending community colleges can serve all stakeholders.

Currently, the California State University System and some University of California campuses have responded by developing Guardian Scholars or Renaissance programs on their campuses, which are programs that were created to assist former foster youth in meeting their educational goals. While these programs provide valuable insight into the experiences faced by former foster youth, the four-year program models do not necessarily translate well into two-year schools. Additionally, research conducted by the Workforce Strategy Center funded by the Annie E Casey foundation found that "there is a need for the development of a long-term and comprehensive college and career program and policy strategy for foster care youth" (Workforce Strategy Center, 2000). The issues facing foster youth after care are important both locally and nationally. A concerted effort is required to meet the challenges and needs faced by former foster youth on their journey to attain their educational degrees.

This study can also help shape future policy recommendations and programs by helping colleges identify the resources and supports needed for this population of students to be

successful in achieving their degree objectives. It is especially important to study community college programs for former foster youth as they may be the key to these students acquiring the knowledge and skills they need to transfer to and succeed at four-year colleges. The research that exists on foster youth's educational outcome shows that foster youth are not academically prepared for higher education. Consequently, the majority of foster youth's first experiences in higher education will be at a community college. Once there, foster youth will either succeed in attaining their goal or their dream of attending higher education will disappear. Therefore, understanding how community colleges are responding to the needs of foster youth currently enrolled at their campus will provide the field with much needed insight and information that is currently not available.

While little research has been done on foster youth in higher education, there is extensive research on program models that support at-risk youth, as well as literature that address issues of transition and resiliency of at-risk youth. The next chapter will highlight some of the literature that will provide the foundation and framework for this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Foster youth have the least successful educational outcomes of any population of young Americans. Foster youth also represent one of the most vulnerable and academically at-risk populations in the nation. This lack of success is due to many factors, not the least of which is the instability and discontinuity encountered by changing schools frequently due to placement changes. But while this instability greatly impacts their academic preparation and achievement, other obstacles further impede their educational success. My study will look at how California community colleges, in particular, are responding to these obstacles and the needs of former foster youth attending their campuses. This study will identify the types of support needed while attending such institutions in order to help these students meet their educational objectives.

Central to the purpose of this study is the development of a more thorough understanding of the difficulties and contributing factors faced by foster youth, which inhibit their success in education. In this chapter, I will analyze the existing research and literature on the following topics: (a) how foster youth are currently performing in secondary education, (b) the nature of foster youth transition from care, (c) how current theories relate to at-risk youth and their success, and (d) current four-year and community college programs created for retention of at-risk students.

#### **Foster Youth in Secondary Education**

The investigation of the research will begin by looking at foster youth high school completion rates, including the General Equivalency Diploma (GED). This is the most proximate sign of foster youth lack of academic preparedness, the subject of the next section – the academic

preparation, which provides the foundation upon which to build a future successful transition to college. Between 1982 and 2005 twelve former foster youth studies were conducted, which included high school completion rates. These studies highlight many of the factors interposed between foster youth and their success. The low completion rate for students obtaining either the high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) is an especially strong indicator of institutional underperformance. These rates show how far foster youths lag behind the general population.

The two earliest studies were by Zimmerman (1982) and Festinger (1983). Both studies show foster youth rates of high school completion. Zimmerman's study was conducted in New Orleans, while Festinger's was conducted in New York City. Zimmerman interviewed 61 former foster youths and found, during follow-up visits, that 39% had graduated high school. Festinger interviewed 277 former foster youth and found that 65% had completed high school (Festinger, 1983).

Other studies conducted throughout the nation focused on specific regional, state, and county foster youth systems. In 1990, Richard Barth interviewed 55 Northern California youth who had exited from care prior to 1989. Barth found that 55% had not graduated from high school upon leaving care and that, by study's end, 38% of the 55% had not obtained their high school diploma or equivalency (Barth & University of California, 1990). Barth acknowledged that the study sample might have been skewed or overrepresented, as the foster youth he interviewed had participated in a foster youth program that provided academic support, and a majority of them came from affluent suburban communities. In an attempt to counter possible distortion and arrive at a more representative sample, Barth also included group homes, the California Youth Authority, and the California Conservation Corps in this study. While this

study was conducted in the 1990's, its importance is that it also highlights the role played by Independent Living programs. These ILP programs were responsible for providing foster youth with life skills and college preparation (Barth & University of California, 1990). This latter study and those that followed examined factors that make it more difficult for foster youth to perform academically.

In 1991, Cook conducted interviews with 810 former foster youth in a multi-state study which looked at participants two to four years after they had left care (1991). This study found that 54% of youth had obtained a high school diploma by the time they left care. In 1994, (Mech, 1994) looked at the aggregated data from the four previous studies and concluded that 58% of foster youth had a high school diploma. Another important finding included in a study by the Vera Institute of Justice (Finkelstein, Wamsley, & Miranda, 2002), as well as the one by Wolanin (2005), is that many foster youth never complete their education, and those who complete it do so by obtaining a GED at a disproportionately higher rate than non-foster youth who meet their high school requirements by getting a diploma. The study by Finkelstein et al. was conducted in 2002 and entitled "What Keeps Children in Foster Care from Succeeding in School?" Finkelstein, the principal author of the study, wanted to understand the day-to-day effect of a young person's experience in foster care. The research team interviewed 25 children who had been participating in an experimental program; they also interviewed 54 adults associated with these children, including foster parents, school staff, and social workers. Wolanin's study, discussed in the theory section, suggested that people who obtain a diploma, as compared to the GED, are generally more successful as adults and twice as likely to enroll in post-secondary institutions. This finding highlights an important component of the current study and its concern with foster youth's later outcomes and experiences in post-secondary education.

More specifically, many of the studies mentioned above attempted to capture data about rates of college attendance and college graduation – these outcomes being more alarming than the high school completion rates alone. The current data on high school graduation rates, according to Ed Trust-West’s Raising the Roof California public school data, reported the following numbers using the Cumulative Performance Index (CPI): 69.1% graduation rate for all students, 62.5% Black, 59.2% Latino, 84.5% White, and 100% Asian (2006). While there is not an exact breakdown by ethnicity of foster youth high school graduation rates, California national studies have reported that nationally less than half of the foster youth population graduates from high school (Blome, 1997; Burley, Halpern & Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2001; Wolanin, 2005). Between 2011 and 2013 the Stuart Foundation sponsored a series of studies that were written by Kristine Frerer and Lauren Davis Sosenko. The studies have focused on the educational outcomes of foster youth in high school and their academic preparedness. These studies will be discussed in the next section and highlight that not only are students falling behind the general student population but that foster youth are also falling behind other at-risk student populations.

### **Academic Preparedness**

The investigation of the research will now look at the academic preparation among foster youth prior to transition from care. Throughout this literature review, studies and policy advocates assert that education is the key factor in determining whether or not a youth will successfully transition from care to adulthood (Lips, 2007). Studies demonstrating this lack of academic preparation are important to my research focus because, firstly, they highlight the fact that foster youth have not been successful in high school. Secondly, the research shows how this lack of preparation impacts not only their access to higher education but also subsequent college

success. Although it may seem obvious that lack of academic preparation works against foster youth's long-term success, this analysis of the literature will look at the systemic exclusion of foster youth from the type of quality education that is necessary in helping them meet and overcome their future academic challenges and achieve their educational objectives at post-secondary institutions.

For the purposes of this discussion a successful transition is characterized as a young person emancipating from the system, enrolling in a post-secondary institution, attaining a degree, and then obtaining employment. For foster youth collectively, success is characterized by reaching post-secondary enrollment and employment rates equaling that of the general population of young adults. While there has not been a significant amount of research done on foster youth who are successful in attaining their educational degrees, there have been numerous studies that identify the factors that contribute to the lack of academic preparation needed to ensure that successful educational attainment is possible.

It is important to highlight that foster youth, although often facing the same obstacles associated with poverty and membership in less-privileged racial classes, must also deal with obstacles unique to the foster youth experience. These factors are the subject of the current section.

The Vera study (Finkelstein et al., 2002) found that foster youth face unique obstacles which other economically disadvantaged children do not face. Finkelstein et al. compared the foster youth outcomes to those of students who came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in an effort to identify differences or similarities. They found that foster youth still faced additional barriers, and that the obstacles these foster youth faced greatly impacted their academic performance. The following obstacles were noted as reasons for foster youth's poor

academic performance: maintaining ties with biological parents and siblings, mandated court appearances, doctor's appointments, school transfers, behavioral issues, and avoiding social interactions with peer groups in order to hide foster status.

The Stuart Foundation funded a longitudinal research project that studied the difference in educational outcomes between the foster youth population and other economically disadvantaged students in California. The research project funded three different studies that analyzed the same longitudinal data set. However each study looked at the high school and college educational outcomes through a different lens. The first study conducted in 2011, "First Look: Foster Youth Education Outcomes in Four California Counties" looked at data provided by the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) which is a statewide case management tool used by Child Welfare serving institutions to input data about youth in care and the second data set was from the California Partnership for Achieving Student Success (Cal-PASS) the only data system that collects student educational data from K-16 institutions in California.

The Stuart Foundation's report "First Look: Foster Youth Education Outcomes in Four California Counties" (2011) looks at the educational outcomes of foster youth by comparing them to other at-risk youth populations. The study analyzed the child welfare administrative data and the education data provided by Cal-PASS and California Department of Education (CDE) by comparing key educational benchmarks such as English CST proficiency, Math CST proficiency, persistence, remedial courses, degree attainment and risk factors such as race, low income, disabilities and type of school placement. The data was framed by looking at youth 12 to 21 years who were in foster care between January 1, 1998 and December 31, 2008 and who resided in four California counties (p. 5). The data was encrypted to protect the anonymity of the

students due to FERPA laws that specifically prohibit agencies to disclose identifiable data and then broken down by age group and educational institutional type: middle school, community college and university level. The student sample was broken down as follows: in the middle school sample there were 4,186 students that were in the foster care system and 6,405 students were in the comparison group. There were 7,135 students in both the foster youth and comparison sample. In the university sample there were 415 students in both the foster youth and comparison sample. This “First Look” report found that foster youth fared worse on their educational performance and outcomes than other students with at risk characteristics other than foster care placement. In looking at K-12 educational benchmarks such as CST English and Math proficiency foster youth did worse than the general population and closely matched at-risk students. For English CST proficiency, foster youth were half as likely to achieve proficiency as the general population and 25% less likely than youth sharing other at-risk characteristics (Frerer, 2011). When looking at Math CST proficiency foster youth were five time less likely to achieve proficiency in math as the general population and half as likely as other closely matched at-risk students (Frerer, 2011). The study also found that foster youth who attended community college fared worse in persistence, retention and degree attainment compared to their peers. According to Frerer’s study foster youth are 25% less likely to continue their post-secondary education after the first year and they are 15% more likely to enroll in remedial courses and 64% less likely to attain their degree (2011).

The second study by the Stuart Foundation “At Greater Risk: California Foster Youth and the Path from High School to College looked at child welfare administrative data and public education databases as in the first report. But the focus of “At Greater Risk” was to look at the differences between the high school completion of foster youth and the general population of

students. Foster youth entry into community college compared to that of the general population as well as looking at persistence to a second year (Frerer et al., 2013). The data sample was based on 11,337 foster youth who were in 9-11 grades during 2002-03 through 2006-07 and 99,895 students in the general population that had some characteristics that matched the foster youth population. The study found that 45% of foster youth get a high school diploma or certificate in comparison to 79% of the general population and 53% of students who similar at risk characteristics. When looking at the community college enrollment numbers there were 4,060 foster youth in the data subset. The study found that 59% of the general population enrolled in a community college in comparison to 43% of the foster youth population and 46% of at-risk students. Frerer et al. also found that 62% of the students in the general population persist in community college compared to 41% of the foster youth population and 48% of the at-risk population. The study also found that foster youth who lived in group homes or who had multiple placements were 21% less likely to complete high school as compared to foster youth living in kin foster homes. The study also found that foster youth who had “five or more placements were 31% less likely to complete high school, 9% less likely to enroll in community college and 16% less likely to persist in a second year in college” (Frerer et al., 2013).

The third study funded by the Stuart Foundation “Foster Youth Transitions: A Study of California foster youth high school and college educational outcomes” also written by Frerer et al. (2013) analyzed the same data set and reported the same findings. However, this report identified policy and program recommendations to improve educational outcomes for foster youth in secondary and post-secondary institutions. Frerer et al.’s research demonstrated that foster youth as a group struggle more in school compared to not just the general population of students but also students sharing similar at-risk characteristics and that foster youth experience

unique challenges. The study acknowledge recent legislation such as AB 490 that calls for child welfare agencies to work with schools to ensure stability in placements, appropriate resources and timely transfer of academic transcripts when students move from schools. Frerer et al. found that foster youth needed adequate resources and supports to make them successful and a way to identify the youth's needs was to do educational assessments and a plan that would support a youth's transition from high school to college. In addition to providing educational assessments and planning the research team recognized the importance of training caregivers and youth about the requirements need to graduate from high school and college admissions requirements. The study also recommended that more educational resources were needed to support foster youth living in group homes and who were in care during high school. This subpopulation of foster youth needed more support to successfully graduate and enroll into post-secondary.

The Festinger (1983), Barth (1990), and Pecora et al. (1997) studies found that for foster youth who were academically prepared to go on to college, the barriers identified as attributing to their lack of success were access to tuition, financial support, housing, health, and mental health support. A large portion of foster youth are not academically prepared to complete high school, much less continue on to post-secondary institutions (Yu, Day, & Williams, 2002). Three longitudinal studies, Courtney et al. (2001), Barth (1990), and Pecora et al. (1997), further confirmed the lack of academic preparation and introduced other factors faced by foster youth by examining data, case records, and interviews of former foster youth. This research suggests that the contributing factors to this problem are trauma experienced prior to placement, types of home placement, low educational expectations by adults and the system that cares for them, lack of college preparation courses and assistance, inconsistent support, and the overall quality of education.

After reviewing studies by Altshuler (1997b), Blome (1997), Coeyman (2001), and Haymes & de Haymes (2000), Yu (2002) concluded that an often overlooked barrier to foster youth success is the lack of collaboration between the child welfare agencies and schools. This missing control contributes to the poor academic preparation of foster youth. The two biggest factors affecting this deficiency are the lack of stability in school placements and a lack of stability in social workers. These two issues were important because they showed that no one person or institution was responsible for the educational needs and quality of the student's educational preparation or degree attainment (Pecora & Foster Care Alumni, 2003).

Yu notes that foster youth are generally enrolled in basic or low-quality education and are not provided the social supports and environment that meet the needs of youth in care. Yu et al. (2002) highlighted studies that found that 26% to 40% of youth in care repeated one or more grades. In a study that compared proficiency levels amongst foster youth and non-foster youth, "96% of the youth in care scored below grade level in reading comprehension and 95.5% scored below grade level in math" (p. 3). Yu et al. cited another study that found that foster youth are more likely to drop out of high school than non-foster youth, 37% as compared to 16% (Blome, 1997). She also argues that without a quality education, foster youth will never become self-sufficient. Why are the youth placed in these lower-level tracts? Perhaps it is due to lower expectations for foster youth. Regarding any transition to independence, Yu links the instability of youth placement, inadequate support, and low academic performance to the likelihood that youth will falter. But these additional prohibitive factors can also be viewed in another way: maintaining ties with biological parents and siblings, mandated court appearances and doctor's appointments, school transfers (Finkelstein et al., 2002); access to tuition, financial support, housing, health and mental health support; factors indicated in Festinger (1983), Barth (1990),

and Pecora's (2003) studies: access to tuition, financial support, housing, health and mental health support. All of these factors seem to converge into the theme of discontinuity.

### **The Factors of Discontinuity**

The biggest barriers to the success in question were the lack of stability in school placements and a lack of stability in social workers (Yu et al., 2002). These two issues are important because they indicate that no one person or institution is responsible for the educational needs and quality of the student (Pecora & Foster Care Alumni, 2003). Yu also, found that schools could hurt a student's educational progress by delaying enrollment and by failing to follow the Individual Education Plan (IEP).

According to other researchers (Merdinger & Tweed, 2002), especially important to foster youth who decided to go on to college were the following: (a) access to college prep courses, and (b) being presented information about financial aid, counseling or college advising. Even with a high percentage of students who expressed an interest in college, Courtney et al., 2001 found that only 9 % of 141 youth interviewed post-transition had actually entered college. The decision is still a sign of hope, but bound up with these decisions is an element of timeliness – that is that the information is best presented prior to transition, and the earlier such a decision can be made, the more effectively a young person can take steps leading to a fate of educational success. As is discussed in the next section, there has been much interest from child welfare advocates and policy leaders over the fate of foster youth once they “age-out” from care, yet very little is known about the actual results (Courtney et al., 2001).

### **Foster Youth Transition from Care**

Yu et al. (2002) has argued that a foster youth without a quality education will not have post-transition success, but are there also aspects of the transition that can be improved in order

to lead foster youth to a successful outcome? In this section, I will examine the research on the transition of foster youth from care. Specifically, I will look at research that highlights the institutional support provided to foster youth prior to emancipation, along with the support or lack of support immediately following emancipation. This topic is central to this study because the analysis of the literature will not only highlight the problems that foster youth encounter during their transition from care but will also inform this study with the types of support needed for former foster youth to be successful in post-secondary institutions.

As the aforementioned Courtney et al. (2001) stated, despite the interest shown by policy leaders and child welfare advocates, little is known about what happens to foster youth after they “age out” from care. Currently, some researchers are studying the post-transition foster youth experiences in order to provide feedback to the child welfare agencies and Independent Living Programs (ILP) charged with preparing youth to become self-sufficient.

The Courtney et al. study, “Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood: A Longitudinal View of Youth Leaving Care,” tracked the experiences of 141 former foster youth who left care in Wisconsin between 1995 and 1996 (2001). In this study, the team of researchers looked at the experiences of former foster youth who had just transitioned from care. They were young people who had aged-out of care 12 to 18 months prior to the interviews. A final interview was conducted three years after the young person had exited from care. It was a voluntary study and subjects were paid for their participation. The duration of each interview was between 60 and 80 minutes. The sample was selected from youth who were in care for a minimum of 18 months, 17 to 18 years old during the first interview, and had no developmental disabilities. The researchers of the Courtney study felt it was important to select youth who had been in care for a long time, apparently hoping to limit the influence of factors outside the foster youth experience on their

research. They found that aging out of the system was a trying and difficult time for the young adults.

Courtney et al. (2001) are careful to provide a caveat: that there are methodological problems with the research on adult functioning of former foster care youth because of sample attrition, timing of transitions (when the youth transitioned out of care), and the design of the study. In the sample, individuals were in care at different times in their lives and for varying lengths of time. Courtney goes on to highlight studies that were controlled for some of these variables but only identified the study done by Festinger in 1983 as a major study free of problems within the survey design. This attention to previous methodological problems shows the importance the researchers attached to defending their research design as well thought out and as capturing a true picture of foster youth transitions.

The Courtney study is important for several reasons. Firstly, Courtney's research was a longitudinal study of former foster youth that gave the field much needed information on transition issues. Secondly, it captured the aspirations of those youth expressing a desire to attend college. Of the interviewed youth still in care, 79% expressed an interest in going to college; of those that had already emancipated from care, 70% expressed an interest in going to college to get a degree. But, as mentioned in an earlier section, Courtney found that while a high percentage expressed this interest, only 9% of the 141 youth interviewed had later entered college. Courtney's team identified young adults who had not been reunified with their family, did not have the social networks in place, and had participated in the ILP program charged with preparing them for independence (Courtney et al., 2001).

The study by Courtney clarifies the effects of services under the Independent Living Program and other government programs. Additionally, while the intent of the study was to

identify the post-care experiences of young adults who had been in care for “relatively” long periods of time, it also wanted to assess the effectiveness to which government services, including services provided under the Independent Living Program that helps youth make the transition to independence (Courtney et al., 2001).

After the Barth study, Courtney’s was the second such study to touch on Independent Living Programs. ILPs come from legislation intended to provide for foster youth who are still in care during their adolescence. This population is expected to stay in care until they age-out since placement is often not found for them via adoption or reunification with family. The goal of ILPs is to teach foster youth life skills so that they can live independently and to attain self-sufficiency. Barth’s study found that foster youth wanted ILP classes that would include information and practical experience on financial management, job preparation, and educational opportunities (1990). Foster youth in this study felt they had insufficient opportunities or experiences to help them prepare for independence. They asked for transitional housing programs that would allow time to practice independent living skills while they were being financially supported (p. 14). Balancing all the demands and realities of transition were overwhelming, but the respondents felt that ILPs and transitional housing programs could help mitigate some of the obstacles they would encounter when aging-out of the system. Since Barth’s study, ILP legislation has gone through revisions to include some of the findings from this report. Wolanin’s report showed that of the 281,000 youth who had exited from care in 2003: 55% were reunited with their parents, while 18% were adopted, 11% went to live with family members, and close to 13% either emancipated from care (9%), were incarcerated (2%), or ran away from care (2%). Of the above distribution, only 9%, of those emancipating from care were eligible for ILP services.

The Casey Family programs funded a report written by Ellis et al. (2011) “Employment Programs and Life Opportunities for Youth (EmPLOY)” to evaluate a foster youth employment programs funded by Department of Labor. There were five states that were selected to design a program that would work with foster youth 16 to 25 on employment, education and transition support. There were six sites funded and two of the sites that were selected were in Southern California. The intent of the program and the subsequent evaluation would be to identify best practices, develop policy and expand programs to support foster youth obtain their educational outcomes and stronger connections to employment. The study collected data between July of 2007 and June 2009, and at each of the 6 sites there were a total of 788 interviews conducted on foster youth and former foster youth. The staffs of the centers were asked to interview the clients and provide the data to the study group. The data was compiled into an online system and later analyzed. The study found that youth who had fewer housing and school placements did better in school and greater attainment of employment. The analysis of the data and the outcomes also found that students who were given basic independent living skills prior to transition, were provided with individualized case plans to reduce barriers and were provided with paid work experience had better educational outcomes and stronger enrollment and retention patterns in postsecondary institutions.

### **Post-secondary Experiences**

As far as data regarding post-secondary experiences of foster youth, two studies support the need to expand the research literature addressing former foster youth who go on to post-secondary institutions (Cook, 1994; Mech, 1994). Are these youth succeeding and do the supports in place help them improve their academic skills to meet their educational goals? These studies were conducted by interviewing former foster youth to understand their experiences; this

approach informs program design and delivery but also provides post-emancipation outcome data. While it is important to continue to look at the experiences of foster youth, a study focused on institutional responses and services provided to these young people is also important.

The California Social Work Education Center (CALSWEC) produced a 2002 report to educate future social workers and current practitioners about how to help foster youth prepare for their transition out of the system (Merdinger & Tweed, 2002). The researcher did so by documenting the college experiences of former foster youth. Merdinger's study is significant because it identifies the barriers that former foster youth face in going to college. The importance of the study also lies in the fact that over 54% of the students interviewed in the Merdinger study had transferred from a community college ( $N = 189$ ) prior to transferring to the California State University system. While the study did not specifically ask the questions, it can be assumed that some of the experiences that the students spoke of were encountered during their time at the community college level. So while not explicitly directed to community colleges, this information can also help inform two-year institutions of the ways to support former foster youth during the transfer process.

In Merdinger's study, a total of 189 surveys from 10 CSU campuses were collected between 2000 and 2002. Further investigation provided in-depth interviews with a subsample ( $n = 27$ ) of the survey respondents. For both the survey and in-depth interviews, the following areas were addressed: external factors, internal factors, and importance of role models. While it was important to gather the student (individual) perspective, this study also investigated the system-related and county-specific resources that supported the youth who had emancipated from care and had been successful in planning for and enrolling in college (Merdinger & Tweed, 2002). This study also provided an overview of the literature pertaining to the educational

pathways of foster youth to college. The overview concurred with previous findings that foster youth were not academically prepared for college and not informed of their options to attend post-secondary institutions. The researchers also conducted a study on students in post-secondary institutions who were former foster youth. The report was entitled “Pathways to College: Understanding the Psychosocial and System-related Factors that Contribute to College Enrollment and Attendance Among Emancipated Foster Youth: An Empirically-based Curriculum,” and provided five modules. The researchers found that the most influencing factors that prompted foster youths decisions to continue on to college were: information about financial aid (43.9%), information about college application and requirements (31.7%), and participation in college preparation classes while in high school (67.7%). And while the study was conducted on students attending the California State University system, 53.4% of the respondents had attended a community college prior to transferring to their prospective CSU campus.

Further, the study makes recommendations for improving program design. One of the biggest barriers was access to information and knowing where to get assistance. The study asserted, “Structural intervention leads to enrollment, retention, and graduation.” Students that are connected to services such as financial aid, counseling, academic advising, housing, tutoring, and social supports were more likely to graduate and stay enrolled in the university.

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges produced a report in 2008 “Serving Former Foster Youth in California Community College” written by Cooper et al to study the needs of former foster youth attending community colleges as well as look at the impact of Foster Youth Success Initiative at those campuses. The study collected surveys and interviews from students and staff. There were twelve campuses that identified staff to participate in a phone interview and two of the campuses also hosted a site visit for the research

team. They also analyzed the survey data collected from Foster Youth Success Liaisons (FYSL) at the community colleges, and they surveyed 74 students across 36 campuses that participated in an online survey. This study is important because it focused solely on community colleges in California. The key findings of the report were that the colleges were serving foster youth with existing campus resources that made it difficult to address the unique needs identified by foster youth. The programs that were serving foster youth were due to a “personal dedication of one staff” and that it was difficult to identify all of the foster youth on the campus in order to provide resources, services as well as support their education goals. The study made a recommendation that programs serving foster youth should develop “a team approach to serve youth including professional development activities that would engage a wide range of departments” (p. 15). Additionally, it identified the need to enhance staff’s “understanding of the foster youth experience and the appropriate methods to assist them” (p. 12).

Another study, “Helping Former Foster Youth Graduate from College” by Dworsky and Perez (2009) focused on college programs in California and Washington that were serving foster youth. Dworsky and Perez (2009) conducted telephone interviews with 10 program directors and collected a web-based survey with 98 foster youth enrolled in one of the 10 college programs. There were eight campuses from California that participated in the study and one of those campuses was a community college. The other two campuses were in the state of Washington. All of the programs with the exception of one were based on campus and eight of the campuses focused solely on foster youth. The eight campuses that were working with foster youth were privately funded and that the campus would off-set the cost of the program leveraging existing campus resources such as office space and some personnel cost. Dworsky and Perez study found that campuses had a difficult time in identifying foster youth on campus.

One of the ways that campuses tried to identify foster youth was through the financial aid office. The study also highlighted that despite robust recruitment and outreach strategies foster youth were unprepared and did not have the requirements to apply to the four-year colleges. The majority of the directors that were interviewed “estimated that 50 to nearly 100 percent of the students in their program were required to take remedial courses” (p. 17).

The information from the above studies will help guide my assessment of the Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI is important to my study because it attempts to resolve tuition and financial support issues) and college specific programs to determine whether they are addressing any of the needs mentioned in my study. Merdinger’s interviews also included data about interviewees’ motivations and internal expectations; these will be addressed in the next section pertaining to theories relating to success in at-risk youth.

The Institute for College Access & Success released a study “Hopes and Hurdles: California Foster Youth and College Financial Aid in 2009” written by Deborah Frankle Cochrane and Laura Szabo Kubitz. The study wanted to identify why former foster youth in California were not receiving financial aid even though they were eligible to receive federal and state funding. The study found that the instability in school placements decreased student college readiness and didn’t allow for students to make needed connections on campus to find out about college and financial aid requirements.

### **Theories Relating to College Success of At-risk Youth**

This section looks at the theories that relate to success in at-risk youth. The discussion surrounding the support of foster youth in higher education is relatively new, and the limited research in the area shows that post-secondary institutions typically respond to the needs of foster youth by connecting them to programs that traditionally have been used to support at-risk

students (Wolanin, 2005). While there is research dealing with foster youth and resiliency, the research on theoretical models of persistence of foster youth in post-secondary institutions is just starting to emerge. One study in particular, Uesugi's "Still They Rise: An Examination of the Internal and External Factors that Enable Former Foster Youth to Succeed in College" (2009), looks at persistence amongst this population and how, despite the obstacles, some foster youth are succeeding in post-secondary institutions. While Uesugi's study is one of the only studies focusing on persistence amongst foster youth populations, it will be important to also look at models of persistence among other at-risk groups of students. These theories can provide a framework for how to better support foster youth at the community college level. Within this area of analysis, I will look at two specific theories: (a) resiliency and (b) persistence of at-risk students at the community college level. Understanding the reasons why certain students succeed and others do not will further help inform the study on how best to serve foster youth.

Resiliency here is defined as the attitude that a person may have internally that gives them the "capacity to spring back in the face of adversity" (Henderson & Milstein, 1996a). But resiliency is also a set of skills and tools that can be taught to youth in order to develop social and academic competence despite common and/or severe stresses they can experience in their lives (Henderson & Milstein, 1996a). Persistence, on the other hand, is overcoming adversity until reaching predetermined goals and objectives - in the case of our foster youth, educational objectives. Resilient individuals spring back in the face of adversity. And other authors, as will be described below, argue that there are protective factors needed for young people to have internal resiliencies. Accordingly, persistence depends on the protective factors present in families, schools, organizations, and community - factors foster youth often lack.

One of the most influential models of persistence was the first one, developed by Spady (1970). In it, Spady applies Durkheim's theory of suicide to student success. Specifically, Spady connects it to the non-persistent student who has committed "educational suicide." Durkheim's suicides often stemmed from lack of social integration coming in two forms: (a) insufficient moral integration (values) and (b) insufficient collective affiliation or low friendship support. Spady adopts this idea and modifies it into three concepts: a lack of consistent intimate interaction with others, holding values and orientations that are dissimilar from those of the general social collectivity, and a lack of a sense of compatibility with the immediate social system. Spady argued, "Breaking one's ties with a social system stemmed from a lack of integration into the common life of that society" (p. 77). This led Spady to look at the interaction between student attributes and "the influences, expectations, and demands imposed by various sources in the university environment" (p. 64). Since similarities among foster youth can be drawn from Spady's model, it can be argued that foster youth suffer from the lack of continuity and intimate interaction with others. Further, the primary relationships that model intimate relationships (parents) have been destroyed. Additionally, they lack a sense of compatibility and belonging with the immediate social system. Their experience is that of being in care and not being part of the everyday family system. I also argue that Wolanin's view is consistent with the idea that foster youth lack social integration and therefore can have a difficult time navigating post-secondary institutions and staying connected if the adequate social and academic supports are not put in place.

In 1975, Tinto, in order to avoid mere descriptions of processes of interactions, sought to explain them instead. He wanted to demonstrate the interactions between individuals and institutions "that lead differing individuals to drop out from institutions of higher education and

. . . that result in definably different forms of dropout behavior” (p. 90). Although he cited Spady’s research as influential, unlike the earlier research, Tinto attempted to draw in more background characteristics such as social status, race and ethnicity, as well as, career and educational expectations and motivation. Tinto argued that although individual characteristics, academic and social integration were the most important determinants in persistence; it was ultimately the students’ commitment to the goal of college completion as well as their commitment to their educational institution that ultimately determined if they will drop out.

As Pascarella and Terenzini explain in “Predicting Freshman Persistence and Voluntary Dropout Decisions from a Theoretical Model,” Tinto further developed an explanatory, predictive model of the dropout process that has, at its core, the concepts of academic and social integration in the institution. This longitudinal model regards persistence or dropout behavior primarily as a function of the quality of a student's interactions with the academic and social systems of the college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, p. 60). This predictive model of persistence argues that a student’s “integration into the academic and social systems of the college most directly relate to his continuance in that college” (Tinto, 1975, p. 96). He also concluded that it is the student’s commitment to completing college and to the institution itself that most accurately predicts persistence and the former clearly has a more significant role. A lack of commitment to the institution can cause a student to leave that school for another, and without enough commitment to educational goals, the student may not persist in higher education. Indeed, a stronger commitment to educational goals can even cause a student to “stick it out” at an institution with which they have a minimal level of social integration. As such, commitment to educational goals is the strongest predictor of educational attainment. According to Tinto,

“The lower the individual’s commitment to the goal of college completion, the more likely he is to drop out from college” (1975, p. 96).

Beyond this, Tinto specifically discussed the need for more information about the connections between race and persistence. Tinto tells the reader, “It is clear that race is an independent predictor of dropout (independent of both ability and social status), but it is unclear in which ways this aggregate relationship occurs” (1975, p. 119). This information is relevant to the disproportionately high representation of minorities within the foster youth population.

In 1997, Benson’s book, *All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents*, presents “40 building blocks” of the components of human development; these components enhance the health and well-being of children and adolescents. The book focused on defining the concept of developmental assets and was based on studies in 460 urban, suburban, and rural communities. The author targeted all those who seek to bring about positive change for the sake of children and adolescents in our society. Benson seeks to show what asset-building cultures and asset-building communities look like. He also seeks to provide strategies and techniques for growing healthy, asset-promoting communities (Benson, 1997). Additionally, Benson emphasizes the need to shift language from problem deficits and risks to a vocabulary of what is needed to promote a language based on asset building vocabulary.

Going beyond Benson’s descriptions and ideas about shifting language, the researcher Krovetz (2008) presents a family resilience framework for therapeutic and preventive efforts with couples and families in order to draw out abilities and potential. The author also presents a model and reasons for school communities to foster resiliency for its students and staff. Krovetz goes on to present “protective factors.” In particular, the protective factors of caring, high

expectations, and participation are discussed. The researcher's goal is to help school leaders understand and apply Resiliency Theory as a guide to redesigning school communities to become resilient. This former high school principal works from the belief in the ability of every person to overcome adversity if important protective factors are present in a person's life (Krovetz, 2008), while arguing that life in schools should be built upon resiliency theory. He defines the protective factors in families, school, and communities that exist in the lives of successful children and youth. Next, Krovetz compares these protective factors with what is missing from the lives of children and youth who are at-risk. Krovetz presents his research in a way consistent with those who argue that a child is much more likely to develop and maintain a positive, proactive outlook on life if she lives in an environment in which people care about her, have high expectations for her, offer meaningful, positive support, and value her as an individual.

Expanding resiliency thought further to at-risk youth, in Benard's (1997b) article, "Turning It Around for All Youth: From Risk to Resilience," Benard believes – similar to Krovetz's attitude – that all individuals have the power to change. Benard applies resiliency theory first to at-risk youth, then to all youth; both groups include foster youth. The author describes the four common attributes of resilient children: social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose in the future . While most people have some of each of these attributes, using them effectively also depends on protective factors in families, schools and communities. The author then presents three protective factors that buffer risk and enable positive development including caring relationships, positive and high expectations and opportunities to participate and contribute. This researcher also goes on to discuss strategies for building resilience: school level approaches, school-community collaborations and classroom approaches. In the article, "Drawing Forth Resilience in All Our Youth" (Benard, 1997a), the

researcher outlines the paradigm of resilience and suggests how these concepts can serve as a guide in creating powerful interventions and fostering positive development for all youth.

To put these principles into action, Benard, along with co-authors Henderson and Sharp-Light, wrote, “Resiliency in Action” (Henderson, Benard, & Sharp-Light, 1999). The purpose was to provide information needed to create a resiliency curriculum program evaluation and educational and policy reform along with resiliency building approaches. They also focused on communities including social services using resiliency and protective factors inventories. They then addressed promoting resilience in families, fostering resilience in children and youth and selecting resiliency focused parent curriculum. This research allows appreciation of the special predicament facing foster youth who, by definition, lack the parental influence and necessary modeling for them to cultivate the resilient mindset for themselves. Henderson and Milstein (1996b) outline six themes that schools, families, and communities can use to foster resiliency. The themes are opportunities for meaningful participation, setting/communicating high expectations, caring and supportive relationships, promoting pro-social bonding, setting clear/consistent boundaries and teaching “life skills.” The factor of setting and communicating high expectations deserves emphasis, as it naturally leads an individual to cultivate aspirations for future success. In the Merdinger (2002) study (noted previously in this review) the researcher also establishes internal factors that develop into aspirations.

In the Merdinger and Tweed (2002) study, former foster youth were asked questions about internal factors that had contributed to their educational achievement. In this pilot study, Merdinger identified characteristics that the youth possessed: (a) intelligence, (b) access to college prep courses in high school, and (c) an internal expectation to attend college in order to avoid negative outcomes in their lives. While Merdinger noted that these characteristics were

both internal and external, there was not a formal network or program on campus for students, the external factors that helped former foster youth to be successful were support systems that were primarily social in nature but helped them navigate and stay in college. Additionally, Merdinger and Tweed (2002) found that the youth were determined to have a better life than their parents could provide for them or had provided for themselves (Merdinger & Tweed, 2002). This emphasis on forming an environment of expectations was also underscored previously, in this section, by Henderson and Milstein (1996b), Benard (1997a), Tinto (1975), and Pescarelli and Terenzini (1980). These expectations, which spur individual aspirations, lead us to the theories discussed in the next section, as they relate to post-secondary institutions.

### **Community College Retention and Programs for At-risk Students**

This final topic looks at Community College retention and community and four-year college programs that are created for at-risk students. This approach is used because, as was previously indicated, the research on former foster youth and college attendance is lacking and there is an inherent connection between the two groups. By looking at the literature that has been written about retention of at-risk or non-traditional students in post-secondary institutions, we can gather insight about model programs that address the needs of like students. Additionally, it is important to discover whether the new foster youth programs associated with the Foster Youth Success Initiative have used these models to shape their programs. This is significant since Wolanin (2005) has suggested that most institutions have responded to foster youth by using existing programs as the center of the foster youth support programs at four year institutions, citing for example, the use of EOP&S programs, traditionally geared toward helping low-income minority students gain access to and meet their educational objectives at post-secondary institutions.

As I have highlighted in this review of the literature, some foster youth are not academically prepared to enter four-year institutions. They need to build their educational skills and enter post-secondary institutions so that they may be able to lead a self-sufficient life. But alternative educational institutions that can help them build their academic skills on their own will not suffice in helping them succeed in a two-year college and in four-year colleges. Adult schools and Regional Occupational centers can provide skill-building and career-focused instruction but will not be able to help disconnected youth attain their associate degrees or move on to four-year institutions. Furthermore, other post-secondary institutions are not set up to meet the needs of youth who have been disconnected from traditional education and who are not academically prepared (Grubb, 2003). Because of this, community colleges are being called upon to respond to the needs of former foster youth. According to Grubb in “Using Community Colleges to Re-Connect Disconnected Youth,” the community college system is the only institution that is currently set up to address the needs of disconnected youth. He indicates that community colleges are accessible and offer a wide range of program offerings. These institutions also provide bridge programs in order to allow individuals to enroll in certificate programs, associate degree programs, and short-term skill certificate programs – all designed to help students achieve their goals (Grubb, 2003). Additionally, Grubb suggests that community colleges also provide access to mainstream education so that students can transfer to four-year institutions. But more importantly, he contends that community colleges have a commitment to serving everyone through their mission of open access and enrollment.

To many Americans the mission of the community college has symbolized the most accessible way to gain entrance into post-secondary institutions. Community colleges represent the opportunity for non-traditional students to participate in higher education, build skills, and

move towards achieving the American dream of completing a college degree. While the doors of higher education are open through the community college system, many non-traditional students still do not transfer or meet their educational objectives (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). Non-traditional students are typically defined as young single parents, students of color, welfare recipients, immigrant and first-generation college students. In a study conducted by Dougherty and Kienzl, the intent was to see the impact of social background on transfer from community colleges to four-year universities. The researchers examined two national data sets and found that the impact of social background on transfer is indirect; however, social background operated through other “intervening or mediating variables” (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006).

Dougherty and Kienzl are mindful of the internal and external demands facing non-traditional students who enter community college. The researchers contend that the external demands, which include family obligations and work, interfere with a student’s educational goals. They also established that the least amount of demands on a student’s time makes it more likely that they will transfer and less likely that they will drop out of higher education without at least getting a credential. Dougherty and Kienzl stress that the external demands of work severely impact a student’s goal of transferring because needing to work reflects obligations that are incompatible with staying in college. Hines et al. (2005) found that former foster youth who had withdrawn or “stopped out” from college did so because of personal problems or crisis and feeling overwhelmed by work and academic responsibilities.

Because of the growing challenges and the desire to support these students towards successful completion of their educational goals, community colleges have been attempting to address the needs of these students through student services. Bourdon’s synthesis of community college retention literature in “What Works in the Community Colleges,” has highlighted 27

issues that community colleges are grappling with and addressing through innovative programs. The areas of students orientation, success courses, academic advising, financial aid, counseling, community college partnerships with community organizations are what community colleges are using to respond to needs of their students can also help respond to the needs of former foster youth on their campus.

Despite the fact that there is limited research in the area of foster youth and higher education, Davis argues that colleges need to provide structured programs and support for former foster youth in order to help students complete degrees (Davis & National Association of Student Financial Aid, 2006). The attributes of a structured program include student services that extend beyond financial aid. Davis contends that the support that former foster youth are receiving is primarily in financial aid. While this is a step in the right direction, he asserts that comprehensive student services will not only help former foster youth get the support needed to transition to post-secondary institutions, but also meet their educational goals of getting a college degree (Davis & National Association of Student Financial Aid, 2006).

Davis acknowledges that some states have begun to create programs that will support former foster youth in higher education. These are still in the beginning stages and are growing in states such as California, Washington, and Indiana. In California, state law AB 2463 passed in 1996 mandating that public post-secondary institutions respond to the needs of former foster youth. In his report, Davis highlights the Guardian Scholars program that was started in the California State University system as well as The Governors Program in Washington, D.C. While post-secondary institutions are starting to respond, Davis and Wolanin stress the need for a national concentrated effort to help foster youth achieve college access and success. It will be through the colleges and post-secondary systems that are attempting to address this issue that

learning and best practices will be developed. These lessons learned will help other institutions build capacity on their campuses in order to better serve the needs of former foster youth.

The foster youth programs that Davis highlighted in his report were at four-year colleges. But his study also looked at the types of institutions foster youth were attending compared to the general population. He found that foster youth attend similar institutions to the general population. Even though the numbers are small, there are comparable numbers in terms of percentage that attend four-year institutions. 41% of foster youth are attending two-year institutions as compared to 40% of the general population of undergraduates. Additionally, Davis found that 61% of foster youth tend to be enrolled full-time as compared to 54% of the general population, and at two-year universities (community colleges) more than 77% of foster youth receive aid, which is in contrast to 47% of the general population (p. 20).

As mentioned above, the changing demographics at community colleges, along with the growing needs of the student population, has required that colleges change the way they are providing services and academic supports for their at-risk or low-income community college students. The purpose of Purnell's report "Support Success Services That May Help Low-Income Students in Community College," was to highlight an area that is the least understood in terms of reforms taking place at the community college level. Purnell's report was part of a series of studies conducted by Manpower Demonstration Research Corp (MDRC) that focused on two additional areas: curriculum reform for basic skills and financial aid resources. In this report, student services are defined as consisting of the following elements: academic guidance and counseling, academic supports, personal guidance and counseling, career counseling and supplemental services (Purnell et al., 2004, p. 7).

The report acknowledges that student services and how they are arranged or delivered varies by individual campus. Additionally, because these services do not generate revenue for the colleges or draw enrollment for the campuses they are often tenuously funded. Purnell et al. also stressed the importance of studying the capacity of student services to support students' progress in meeting educational outcomes. The researchers highlight that there is some existing evidence that "suggests that special services that target non-traditional students are linked to better academic outcomes and improved retention rates" (Purnell, 2004, p. 11). The report goes on to conclude that the studies that have shown the most important and "potential effectiveness of student services" (p. 12) comes from studies that were conducted on programs that provide comprehensive services for students such as TRIO and EOP&S programs. These programs are classified as "Multiservice Programs" (Purnell, 2004, p. 12). The impact of student services on student achievement supports Tinto's argument that institutions can play a significant role in supporting or hindering a students' academic progress (Purnell, 2004). Purnell believes that this shifts the responsibility or at the very least "some of the attention from what students bring to higher education to what happens to them after they enroll" (Purnell, 2004, p. 13).

Tinto's position that social and academic integration are instrumental to student retention is an important factor to consider. He furthers this discussion by acknowledging that the transition to college and integration within the campus community may be difficult for students of color and non-traditional students (Tinto, 1993). However, he argues that in order to support the needs of students of color, colleges will need to develop strong student communities (services) and campuses that are cognizant of the needs of all their students. While Tinto acknowledges that there are different needs amongst students, researchers that have followed

Tinto feel that the scope of his argument is not inclusive of the experiences of students of color in higher education (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).

Rendon et al.'s study (2000) argues that students of color or "minority" students have altered university and college campuses and have forced post-secondary institutions, especially community colleges, to dramatically change the delivery of instruction and services (p. 19).

Rendon et al. (2000) highlights theories that relate to retention within the context of minority students. The researchers connected the ideas of biculturalism and dual socialization to expand the understanding of minority retention in higher education.

Judging from what theorists have developed regarding resilience and persistence, we can define the program needs of post-secondary foster youth in the following way: while facing special obstacles having to do with academic preparedness, access, counseling, finances, and housing, the most prominent missing factor for foster youth success is the modeling of attitudes of resiliency and persistence that would otherwise be provided by parents. Moreover, central to that missing modeling are expectations resulting in stronger and better-defined aspirations among foster youth (Casey Family Programs, 2008; Hines & Merdinger, 2005; Wolanin, 2005).

In considering those special obstacles, it is helpful to recall Wolanin's report on foster youth for policy makers (Wolanin, 2005). He gathered information from diverse data sources including spanning financial aid, education, and health and human services, to estimate that there are close to 300,000 foster youth that are between the ages of 18-24. Wolanin established the total number of youth who had "aged-out" of care and youth who had been in foster care after the age of 12 but who left care prior to "aging-out" (p. 6). However, he estimates that of that number, there are only 150,000 foster youth who are eligible for post-secondary education. He

defines eligibility for post-secondary education as having a high school diploma. Again, it appears to be lack of academic preparedness leading to lack of access.

In Davis' study, he was able to identify a sample of former foster youth in college and the types of institutions they were attending but he notes that there is a lack of research on the experience of foster youth once they begin their college career and the struggles that they encounter while completing their degrees. However, Davis acknowledges that what is known about foster youth is that they too are the first in their families to attend college but that, unlike other undergraduate students who are first generation students; they are also financially independent compared to the rest of the general population. Additionally, they are not connected to a support network, which for most students is typically defined by their families. Foster youth's only support network has been the system that raised them and when they transition to college the campus environment in essence becomes their support system. This is a critical point and supports a recommendation that foster youth need targeted programs to support them on the college campus.

Furthermore, Davis found that the majority of foster youth in the system are minority students. However, the majority of the students that enrolled in college were white, representing 51% of the 78,000 foster youth enrolled in post-secondary education. He also found that most foster youth enrolled as undergraduates were younger and that 62% of the foster youth undergraduates tended to range in age from 19 to 24, compared to 39% for non-foster youth population. The data set did not identify anyone over the age of 25, which is in contrast to the general population that reported 39% of the non-foster youth undergraduate population as 25 years and older (Davis & National Association of Student Financial Aid, 2006).

Understanding enrollment rates is important but student aspirations to college provide insight to students' goals when entering post-secondary institutions. As for aspirations of community college students, we look at research conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges, via survey, of over 100,000 students at 45 community colleges around the country. Among their findings: 60% listed meeting occupational requirements as a major reason for attending college (Laanan, 2000). This is important because all young people during transition to adulthood understand the importance of moving forward to post-secondary institutions; foster youth are no different in terms of career and educational aspirations. The problem is that they encounter additional problems such as needing to support themselves and finding housing.

Tempering the expectation just cited, though, is the “cooling out” effect of community colleges. Romano (2004) re-examined the “cooling out” effect of community colleges put forth by Burton Clark (1960) and others. This effect is a long-standing criticism of community colleges indicating that they cause students to reduce their educational expectations as they matriculate at the college. This view comes from survey data that showed students having high educational aspirations when entering two-year colleges but many ultimately failing to meet them. Romano used data from surveys and studies conducted in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. One study, conducted by Rehberg (1976), found that community college students enter college with more ambivalence about educational and occupational goals compared to students who enter four-year colleges (Romano, 2003). Rehberg believes this lack of decisiveness with regard to educational ambitions is the cause of lower educational aspirations of community college students. Romano's research also leads the author to conclude that the “cooling out” precedes entrance into college. The researcher relates that when entering students are surveyed “the

conviction with which two-year college entrants answer a survey question about their educational aspirations is probably weaker or more uncertain than those who enter four-year colleges” (Romano, 1985). Students identify goals on surveys that they do not actually believe are possible because of perceived limitations of time, financial resources, and academic ability. Romano’s recommendation for community colleges is to place more emphasis on quality counseling and “the building of a culture that promotes high expectations” (p. 319). This is important because if students experience a “cooling out” period and have lower expectations of obtaining a degree, foster youth might fare worse. Romano also argues it is important to have quality counseling and support. If non-foster youth students need this support, it bolsters the claim that foster youth need it more; they would need quality counseling that goes beyond initial counseling at the beginning of the year.

Usually, “a culture that promotes high expectations” (p. 319) is well embedded in a positive campus climate. Peterson and Spencer (1990) discussed climate as the existing perceptions, attitudes, and norms that frame an institution and its constituents. But the post-secondary climate as it pertains to foster youth is filled with a certain tension; namely, it is the belief of educators mentioned by two researchers in this literature review (Yu, 2002; Wolanin, 2005). Wolanin states that in higher education there is an assumption that youth should be prepared and responsible for their education as well as possessing basic adult competencies, meaning that they are able to manage their lives including being responsible for housing, feeding, controlling their finances, health care and transportation. Mistakenly, educators believe that once students, foster youth students in particular, reach their respective college campuses they should have the necessary tools to succeed. It is this central facet of the post-secondary climate (i.e., the notion that all students at this educational level are already fitted to their task),

that can shake the former foster youth's self-confidence and commitment, thereby causing a student to develop an aversion to schooling and undercutting chances of success.

If foster youth are to fulfill these assumptions educators hold about all students, the study done by the Social Science Research Center should be considered. The intent of the study was not only to identify colleges that had existing foster youth programs but also to help establish best practices. The findings can support other universities that are interested in creating a former foster youth program on their campus. While a big section of the study focused on process challenges, it also discussed findings that are relevant to the previously mentioned research; structured and student support programs can provide non-traditional college students, in this case foster youth, with the services needed to be successful in post-secondary institutions. In the SSRC study, 16 former foster youth programs were identified by the Orangewood Children's Fund and these campuses agreed to participate in the study, which was conducted by the SSRC at Ball State University.

Of the 16 universities/colleges that participated, 6 were community colleges and 2 of those campuses were in partnership with a four-year university. The remaining four community college programs were in California and all were located in the Orange County area. The "model programs," that were identified in this study served former foster youth. This study proposed that the following post-secondary support for former foster youth are in place: strong networking with community partners, housing referral or placement (no residential services), expedited processing of financial aid, direct access to campus advocates, summer bridge program, coaching and monitoring academic/vocational performance, and academic support (SSRC, 2007).

In addition to the findings presented above, the SSRC concluded that when it came to structuring programs, campuses would benefit by ensuring the presence of an advisory group or a group of stakeholders at each campus that is invested in the program and that can offer technical assistance in terms of identifying resources (p. 29). The researchers also found that it was important to build collaboration or a coalition of programs that would provide resources and services for students on the campus. Finally, the researchers learned that most of the programs created for foster youth were based on models that had traditionally served at-risk students. The campuses looking to create new programs should seek support and guidance from existing programs that deal with at-risk youth but should remain cognizant to the additional needs of foster youth (SSRC, 2007, p. 30).

The researchers also identified additional elements that helped in keeping youth connected and engaged in the programs: the use of a case management approach, connecting youth to mentors that followed up on their academic performance, working with professors and instructors to track attendance and grades, and asking students what they wanted and needed (SSRC, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

Although equity and access for non-foster youth students in California's community colleges were reached nearly twenty years ago, there is still an unclear understanding of how foster youth persist and succeed at the community college level. Post-secondary education is almost a necessity for mainstream American competitiveness, so one's ability to compete is, more often than not, determined by education level. Throughout this literature review we have seen that foster youth are less educated. When they do reach the post-secondary portion of the educational pipeline – community colleges in this case – are they persisting? Are they being

supported to meet their goals? And, are they transferring to four-year institutions? Despite the absence of research and evidence that point to foster youth student persistence in higher education, foster youth aspirations are met with obstacles that occur during transition. The literature also shows that a greater coherence between high school preparation and college readiness, the lack of continuity in these students' lives, and institutional receptivity would be excellent starting points when considering moving foster youth farther along the educational pipeline.

As foster youth move along the educational pipeline, all of America moves along the educational pipeline with them. A rising tide lifts all boats. In 2006 there were a little over one million youth in the United States either in, entering, or exiting the foster care system (AFCARS data). Foster youth are increasingly becoming a significant portion of our society finally getting the attention of state and federal policy leaders. This is an important demographic to consider when looking at educational reform at both the high school and post-secondary level. Our educational leaders need to ensure that all youth's needs are met. If we, as a nation, continue to ignore the plight of foster youth and leave them even further behind those already left behind, America will not only reduce its workforce but also exacerbate other social problems impacting our communities. In order for foster youth to successfully transition to self-sufficiency, higher education will be the best way to help these young adults maximize their resources and build necessary skills needed for their future.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### **Introduction: Problem Statement**

In the first two chapters I presented literature and data that supported the need to study foster youth in post-secondary institutions. For the purposes of this research project, I will conduct a case study on community colleges that are creating programs specifically aimed at serving the educational needs of foster youth. In the past several years campuses and community college systems have responded to the growing needs of transitioning foster youth on their campuses. In large part, campuses were reacting to Assembly Bill 2463 that was passed in 1995 mandating post-secondary institutions, including community colleges, to respond to the needs of emancipating foster youth. In the spring of 2007 the California Community College Chancellor's Office answered this call by initiating a system wide action by creating the Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI). The goal of the FYSI was to have a liaison on each campus that would be able to assist foster youth in getting resources and supports to meet their educational goals.

In the first year, the chancellor's office conducted training for over 100 people representing 85 community colleges on the Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI). However, some campuses have moved beyond the liaison model to create a program specifically designed for former foster youth. Being able to understand campuses' needs to respond programmatically and institutionally can help other campuses to not only create future programs but also influence policy. Additionally, understanding what foster youth report as having an impact on their educational degree attainment will help campuses improve or expand on their program design.

My study will examine how three California community colleges are responding to the needs of their former foster youth. I will study three campuses that have created a program that specifically addresses the needs of foster youth. Interviewing program personnel at the program level will help to identify the challenges and successes that they have encountered as they strive to support foster youth in meeting their educational objectives. Interviewing foster youth about their experiences will provide much needed insight for the campuses but also for the body of research. The following research questions will guide my study.

### **Research Question**

The predominate question for this research project is How do California community colleges address the needs of former foster youth enrolled on their campuses? In order to address the research question the following are four areas of inquiry will be examined:

- a. According to former foster youth, what are the challenges they face in accomplishing their educational goals at a community college? What are the differences, if any, in students' perceptions and staff's perceptions about these challenges?
- b. What supports do foster youth see as having helped their educational progress, i.e., what things do they say have aided their transition to college and their attainment of a degree What supports do foster youth say they needed but did not have?
- c. According to former foster youth, how knowledgeable are community college personnel regarding the types of support(s) they need to meet postsecondary educational goals? What are the differences, if any, in students' perceptions and

staffs' perceptions about the types of support(s) they need to meet postsecondary goals?

- d. How do foster youth describe their college life experience? How connected do foster youth feel toward their college, program personnel, peers, and services on their campus?

### **Research Design**

My research design will utilize a qualitative method, specifically case study methodology. The study of community college programs that work with foster youth will be best served by employing the case study method as opposed to other methods of research because there is little research about this area. Case study methodology will assist me in understanding this complex issue within the context of each campus and will allow for me to build upon the limited body of knowledge with the hope of strengthening current programs, as well as assisting other post-secondary institutions in creating meaningful supports for former foster youth. The community college programs that will be part of the study all vary and using a case study methodology will allow me to identify and analyze a set of conditions and the relationships that impact and surround the program at each campus. Additionally, case study methodology will allow me to examine real-life situations that are current and will provide a foundation to generalize theories (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

The definition provided by Yin (2009) of a case study allows for studying students in their contexts and to highlight multiple variables that are involved. This is important because of differences in programs on the three campuses. The ability to study the distinction and the multiple factors that exist can provide a holistic understanding of the challenges and successes of these programs face in supporting foster youth meet their educational objectives.

The primary focus of the qualitative study will be to conduct case studies of each of the three campuses that have created a program to support foster youth. In principle and for the purpose of the study, they are campuses that have gone beyond the Foster Youth Success Initiative. It is important that this study identifies challenges and successes from the programmatic perspective with the goal of identifying emerging models or promising practices that can eventually be used system-wide.

These three colleges were selected for the study because of their commitment to serve this population of students, because they each are at different stages of their program development, and because they are located in three distinct areas of Los Angeles County. All these reasons will add to a different dimension of learning. The colleges are: Roses Community College, Angeles Community College, and Ocean Community College.

The data will be collected within a consecutive two and a half month time period that will provide me time to do analysis of any existing data and help me to refocus the questions or request additional information between each of the site visits. Due to the limited research in this area, I will employ the following data collection methods: (a) interviews, (b) document review, and (c) observations. These methods will help collect and establish the foundational information that is needed to understand this issue. Qualitative methodology allows for a more in-depth, holistic gathering of data and analysis in an area with little to no previous data (Creswell, 2009). The data collected from three different campuses in a specified amount of time can assist me in identifying commonalities, differences, and hopefully promising practices that can be implemented across the community college system. Interviews are optimal because they will provide an opportunity to discover, learn, and discuss the experiences and challenges that

emancipated foster youth actually face. Connecting the respondent's experience (story) will provide me with an in-depth analysis of the area being studied.

The three data collection methods are: (a) open ended interview questions for program staff, support services staff, and students; (b) observations of meetings that take place with campus personnel and students, and campus environment; and (c) review of documents and policy directives that currently exist at the campus level and looking at student data from each of the campuses. Approaching the study in this manner can allow for the emergence of key elements that can be used to assist former foster youth meet their educational degree objectives. The interviews with program staff, support personnel, and students will provide in-depth data on student needs and program design elements that would not come from the quantitative data.

### **Site Selection and Description**

This study will take place in Los Angeles County in partnership with three California community colleges: Roses Community College, Angeles City College, and Ocean Community College. The campuses were selected for various reasons but primarily because they were open to participating in the study and in identifying ways they can improve their program model.

Roses Community College (RCC) is located in Los Angeles County close to the Santa Monica Mountains. It is one of the largest community colleges within the California Community College system and boasts a high transfer rate. In fall 2011 RCC had an enrollment of over 25,000 credit and 3,000 non-credit students comprised of 6.7% African American, 21% Asian, 40.6% Hispanic and 17.9% white. RCC prides itself on creating and providing innovative programs for its students coming from throughout Southern California as 65% of its student body lives outside of the district boundaries. As compared to 2009/2010, there was a small decrease in enrollment in 2011/12.

Roses Community College (RCC) was selected because they have an existing program on campus, they have a long established relationship with the Transitional Resource Center (TRC), which provides services for former foster youth in the City of Roses, and they are also funded to provide Independent Living Skill (ILP) courses and provide resources to foster families. The TRC, funded by Department of Children and Family Services and Casey Family Programs, is primarily focused on assisting foster youth with their transition from care. Additionally, in the Roses area there are several transitional living group homes designed to provide foster youth with a place to live while they go to school or work.

The campus was undergoing construction but maintained open green space for students to congregate. There is a large water feature between the admissions building and the library. There is also a main student walk way that connects the admissions, cafeteria, student services and lecture hall building(s) that also provides space for student club representatives to set up tables to hand out information to students. The campus and library were crowded when the campus was visited during the course of the interviews.

RCC Stars Program focuses on connecting and supporting former foster youth that attend their school. The Stars Program is housed through RCC's Community Services Division that is based at the Community Education Center that is located two miles from the main campus. The Community Services division has a contract with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to run the Independent Living Program (ILP) classes for current foster youth as well as provide training workshops and resource support for Kinship/Foster Parents residing in the service area of the district. The executive leadership of RCC under the guidance of RCC's Dean of Financial Aid and the Community Services Director created the Star Program to focus specifically on the needs of former foster youth that were enrolled at RCC.

The Dean of Financial Aid went beyond the intent of the Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) and pulled together people from various student services units on campus, the community services division, resources in the community as well as DCFS to build a cross system collaborative that would work together to provide wrap around services for former foster youth enrolled in the RCC campus. The Dean of Financial Aid and the Community Services Director co-chair the intercampus/community committee focused on providing support to former foster youth. The collaboration provides resources and commitments for the Stars Program and they continue to meet on a monthly basis to implement and grow the program. The Stars Program does not receive any funding for staff or a center for the program. However, the Dean of Financial Aid and the Community Services Director have leveraged resources within their units to provide personnel that support former foster youth access services in order to meet educational goals.

The Community Services Director hires ILP peer mentors that are current RCC students who are also former foster youth to mentor and host workshops for current foster youth but also to give the peer mentors internship and work experience that will support their class schedules. The Director of Financial Aid has identified three financial aid counselors to work with students on a part-time basis in the Stars program. The Dean of Financial Aid and the Community Services Director co-chair an intercampus committee focused on providing support to former foster youth. While there is no identified space or dedicated funds, the collaboration has on and off campus supports. Former Foster youth also created a Stars Club on campus to fundraise for activities and to build a peer-mentoring component to support one another through community college as well as transferring to a four-year university.

Angeles Community College (ACC) is located in the urban center of Los Angeles in a densely populated community. It is in close proximity to entertainment and healthcare industries and has public transportation at its doorstep. It is a campus that boasts a multicultural, multilingual and diverse community and states that it has more languages represented than any other campus within the California Community College system. ACC prides itself on serving students throughout the Los Angeles basin. ACC is one of the oldest community colleges in the Los Angeles area founded in 1938 having housed a four-year university prior to 1919. In fall 2011 ACC had a total enrollment of more than 18,000 credit students comprising of 13.2% African American, 17.9% Asian, 45.7% Hispanic and 21.6% white. This represented a 3.63% increase over fall 2009 enrollment numbers.

ACC was chosen because they were the first community college to receive funding from the Stuart Mott Foundation to implement a Guardian Scholars Program on their campus specifically targeting foster youth. ACC received a grant to assist former foster youth in the amount of \$420,000 for a three- and a-half-year period starting in 2009. Each year was funded at \$125,000 with \$45,000 provided in the beginning as implementation money. All funds were made available from the Stuart Foundation to create a Guardian Scholars Program (GSP) on campus. At the time of the study the campus was in its first year of the program. This is the first community college campus to receive funding for a GSP program in LA County. The campus' foundation was working on sustainability in the event that the grant would not be renewed. The GSP program has four staff: Program Director, Case Manager, Counselor and Life Skills Teacher. The only full time position is Case Manager. The other positions are partially funded and these staff members oversee additional projects. The GSP program works with the Foster

Youth Success Initiative Liaison who works in Financial Aid. GSP has also identified liaisons throughout campus so that they can refer foster youth for services.

The GSP program provides services that range from financial aid assistance to academic advisement. The program also works closely with students on academic advisement by providing a part time counselor that assists students in class selection, registration and educational planning. The GSP program also provides other services such as tutoring, mentorship, personal guidance and counseling. Additionally, there are referrals and resources to cover the range of needs that students may encounter. The staff provides access to support services such as childcare, transportation and housing. Students in need of employment services and career counseling are also supported through a professional development course that covers resume building and career exploration. In order to be eligible for the program foster youth need to be enrolled as a full time student between the ages of 16-24 and maintain a 2.0 GPA.

The GSP has an office located in the Student Services Village in the center of campus that also houses the financial aid and EOP&S office. The building also has other student supports such as tutoring and disabled student services. The GSP has three computers that foster youth can access to check email, register for classes and print out papers. There is also a small area for students to meet with the counselor and case manager.

Ocean Community College (OCC) is located in Los Angeles County south of the Los Angeles International Airport. It is one of the smallest community colleges within the California Community College system. In fall 2011 OCC had a total enrollment of 10,205 credit students comprised of 16.2% African American, 17.1% Asian, 48.8% Hispanic and 16.4% white. Between fall 2009 and fall 2011, there was an 8.2% increase in the student population. OCC is currently in a period of expansion of the campus while at the same time it is creating innovative

programs for its students. The campus is located in an industrial area off of the freeway and does not have many retail outlets or residential areas close to the campus. There is bus transportation that drops students off at the front of the campus. OCC is a spacious campus with a mixture of old buildings that are being refurbished and also has a new administrative office building where the financial aid office is located. The campus buildings and services are spread out and are surrounded by green spaces and tables for student use.

OCC was selected because they are the campus that has the closest proximity to Gates High School, which is noted as serving the largest number of foster youth within LAUSD, as well as its proximity to group homes and transitional living facilities. OCC created their foster youth program a year after the Foster Youth Success Initiative was launched and has been recognized by the Chancellor's office for its desire to provide support for foster youth. OCC also had been funded in the past to provide ILP courses for foster youth who would age out of care.

OCC receives no funding to run or operate the Foster Youth Success Initiative. There is a liaison identified in the Financial Aid office that is responsible for the Chafee grant for students eligible to receive funds attending OCC. The FYSI liaison is a non-funded position and the person identified must assume these responsibilities along with other job assignments in the financial aid office. No additional staff members were identified on campus to support foster youth. The liaison acts as counselor, case manager, resource guide, and mentor for the foster youth she is in contact with. There is no physical space on campus set aside for foster youth to meet nor is there a private location for the liaison to meet with youth and hold workshops or provide space to study. Information on the number of foster youth attending the campus was not made available during the data collection period or made public by the college campus.

## **Data Collection Methods**

### **Interviews**

The data will be collected during a two and a half month period to allow for availability amongst staff and students. Since there are three campuses, I would like to spend two weeks at each site. This will give me enough time to interview both students and staff, accommodate schedules, as well as gather documents and conduct observations. I expect to interview eight to ten people per campus. The composition will consist of five students and three to five staff/personnel. Each interview will last approximately one hour. This timeframe will allow me to transcribe field notes and look at primary documents and, if needed, refocus and ensure that I am getting quality data that will help me draw conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Additionally, during the collection period, I will ensure that I am managing the data by creating a system that creates uniformity and consistency. I will use a software data management system to manage my data collection and analysis. I will need one that is capable of storing, managing, coding, linking, tagging, and analyzing the data for each of the sites. The optimal software will allow me to manage the data collection by site and then analyze it across the campuses or the multiple cases. In addition to storing data such as transcripts, I will be able to store documents and field notes. This study will require that I collect data from interviews, observations, and documents. The amount of data I will be collecting from each site will require a central location that will allow me to manage, store, and later reduce the data for easier analysis. For these reasons, I will need NVivo v.9.0 to provide a data management function that will also provide the capability to analyze and link information. For the purposes of this study, I will create an interview protocol for each of the following groups participating in the study: students, program staff, and support services staff (Appendix C, D & E).

For research questions one through four, I will interview five students per campus. I will ask each campus to identify foster youth that are enrolled in their program and inform them of my study. I will create a flyer and email to be posted and sent out by program staff. Interested students will be asked to fill out a basic demographic sheet and participate in a one-hour interview and will receive a small incentive for participating. Student interviews will identify any perceived challenges students face at a community college and supports they feel they have.

For research sub questions 1a and 1c, I will interview program and support service staff that work directly with the foster youth program and those that work with support offices on campus. I will conduct an initial meeting with program staff in order to gain insight into the design of their program as well as identify individuals I can interview for the study, such as campus staff and students. Each campus varies in size and scope and each has a different number of dedicated staff for the foster youth program. However, all staff will be invited to participate in the study. Preliminary investigation has found that SCC has the greatest number of dedicated staff to their program, which is a total of three. Foster youth programs are beginning to get funding which has allowed SCC to hire dedicated staff to work specifically with the foster youth on campus. However, this is not the case at every campus. I will work with the liaison at each site to identify which staffs are funded to work only with foster youth on their campus, as well as identify the support staff that work with the foster youth by providing support services. I will interview all staff assigned to work with the foster youth program and will invite the other identified staff from the different units to participate in the interviews. At minimum, I would like to interview two campus personnel representing the following support areas: counseling, financial aid, EOP&S and program staff.

As mentioned previously an interview protocol will be developed for each of the following populations: program staff, campus personnel, and students. I will provide the interviewees with a general overview of the themes that will be discussed during the interview. For the interview questions, I will look to Dworsky and Perez's recent study on "Helping Former Foster Youth Graduate from College: Campus Support Programs in California and Washington State." While their study focused on four-year institutions that had Guardian or Renaissance Scholars programs on campus, the survey and interview questions used can provide a background as I conduct my study.

The study wanted to see if foster youth support programs had a positive effect on the retention and graduation rates of the students. They interviewed staff of Guardian and Renaissance Scholars programs at four-year universities. Each of the campuses interviewed noted that the programs were assisting youth in meeting educational goals and had successful outcomes. However, the researchers noted that the lack of comprehensive data made it difficult to show outcomes and suggested that a summative evaluation be done to study these campuses foster youth support programs (Dworsky & Perez, 2009).

While not all of the questions will be the same, I will look to the Dworsky and Perez (2009) study to help inform and shape my interview protocol. Each protocol will be piloted with a population similar to the stakeholders in the research. Each interview is expected to last one hour and they will be recorded using a digital recorder and later transcribed. Once interviews have been transcribed they will be provided to the interviewee to ensure accuracy. Interviewees will have a chance to make additional comments. The interviews will take place at a private place on campus for staff, campus personnel, and students.

## **Document Review**

I will also collect the following documents: program brochures and other materials given to students, policy directives, annual reports, program and demographic data. In the initial meeting with the site liaison, I will ask how the program was created and if there are any documents that can be reviewed. In working with each of the campuses, I will ask the site liaison to provide me with documents that will be pertinent to my study.

## **Observations**

During the study, I will also be doing observations of the sites participating in the study. The observations will help me to describe the environment and analyze the interviews and documents gathered within the context of the site. These observations can support or frame the experiences and perceptions that were shared during the staff and student interviews. I will observe each of the program and campus environments. I am primarily looking at the proximity of the foster youth program office to other support services on campus, as well as the location on campus. Additionally, I hope that by conducting the interviews of both staff and youth on campus that I will be able to do some observations of the interactions between staff and youth. During my initial visits I am hoping to identify the structure of the program and identify if there are program meetings for youth or for staff members. If there are, I will ask to participate in the meeting to get more of a sense of the culture and environment of the program.

## **Data Analysis**

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data collection and management must be thought out prior to conducting a study and carefully planned in order to have quality data in the end for the analysis. Identifying these strategies prior to the data collection period will assist me in the analysis of the data. Therefore, I will ensure that once interviews have been transcribed, I

will use data management software to store the data but also to code into themes. Analyzing and reducing the data into manageable parts will ultimately provide me with an understanding of how to display the data and ultimately draw conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I will also have a standard template to document field (observation) notes. In order to manage the documents being received from each of the campus, they will be scanned and entered into the data management software. The documents will be analyzed and coded into different themes. I will create a standard template to capture elements that are present at each campus that will help during the analysis portion of this study.

Once all of the data is entered into the data management software and coded, I will be able to triangulate the data to see if there are similarities in the perceptions between students and staff or vast differences. This can bring about much needed information in designing programmatic supports for current and future foster youth programs. The data collected from the interviews, documents and observations will assist in providing the much-needed information but may also highlight some of the opportunities to strengthen the educational outcomes of foster youth.

To assist me with the data management and analysis, I will use a qualitative data analysis software program. This will guarantee that once all interviews are transcribed they can be stored in the same database system and then coded for themes. To check the accuracy of the interview transcripts, I will conduct member checks (Algozzine & Hancock, 2006) with interviewees to verify that the transcripts and themes make sense to them and that they accurately reflect what was discussed in the interview.

Using data management software will ensure that interviews and field notes are formatted the same way and that documents will be reviewed and indexed in the same manner,

thus ensuring consistency. The interviews will be transcribed and then imported to the software management program and then analyzed and coded. Since the interviews are the primary data source the use of data management software will assist in identifying themes, linking the data, as well as identifying if there is a need to collect additional data.

The data will need to be simplified and reduced in a manner that will allow for analysis. During the reduction period of the data, it will be important that the data is checked for accuracy, the information is useful, and most importantly that the data I will collect will allow me to identify key findings and recommendations. I will display the data and findings in a semi-structured manner through the use of matrices, charts and graphic organizers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Primarily, I will look at the three different sites participating in the study and categorize students' experiences and responses by themes (categories) thus doing an individual or "within-case display." However, because I will have three different campuses in my study, utilizing "cross-case displays" will assist me in increasing the generalizability of my study and provide a deeper analysis and understanding of the types of supports foster youth need at a community college level (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 172). While I know that this is not a simple task to take on, I believe that it is important for this study to see if there are similar responses or key themes that can be displayed in such a way that will provide other community college campuses with the insight and understanding of what is needed to run a successful foster youth program from the experience of foster youth themselves.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Study**

During my study it will be important to ensure that the collection and analysis of the data is credible. I will need to compare my instruments and protocols with previous studies conducted by Merdinger, the Casey Family Programs Alumni study, and Chapin Hall's study on

Helping Former Foster Youth Graduate from College because this will not only build upon the existing research in the field but will also add to the credibility and trustworthiness of the data analysis and eventual findings. This will help me align my question topics in such a way that has been accepted and vetted through experts in the field. But more importantly, it will help me build upon the current body of research on former foster youth in higher education. In addition, I will share my instruments and protocols with current researchers studying foster youth in higher education and child welfare experts to help me identify any areas that I might have overlooked. This process will also help me to establish a benchmark or a baseline.

Cross-referencing my interview instruments and protocols against the existing body of research will add credibility to my study. However, my interview instruments and protocols will also need to be specific to community college as well as foster youth issues. The aforementioned studies, while pioneers surrounding this issue of foster youth in higher education, focus primarily on four-year institutions'. Since I will be studying three specific campuses with varying program designs, as well as interviewing campus personnel and former foster youth there will need to be questions that address these conditions and allow for this experience to be captured and highlighted. There will be certain questions in each interview protocol (foster youth and campus personnel) that will be similar in order to gather a cross section or a wide representation of ideas and themes from both campus staff and former foster youth.

I will also need to be mindful that I am creating questions that are not leading or suggestive by nature. I need to present myself as a researcher who is interested in gathering information and learning more about the participants experience and knowledge. During the interview process, I will need to be careful that the respondents understand I am exploring issues that may arise or have arisen in the creation of programs that support former foster youth on

campuses and be aware that I will be hearing about experiences that former foster youth have encountered at a community college and while participating in a campus program.

### **Ethical Issues**

The most important ethical issues will be the confidentiality of student information and respect for the students that will be participating in the interviews. I will ensure that interview respondents will remain anonymous as well as maintain the anonymity of the community college campuses participating in the study. The themes that will be discussed during this study will primarily focus on their educational experiences. However, it is possible that this can lead to issues that might be emotional for some of the interviews. I would rely on my background as a case manager to help acknowledge the issues that were raised and transition back to the interview. If I feel that the interviewee needs more support, I will ask permission to suggest or provide additional resources for them. I believe it will be important to establish rapport with the interviewees so that there is some trust during this process in order to solicit the feedback regarding the strengths, weakness, challenges, and successes of each of the campus programs without making anyone feel that they can be singled out. It will be important to build trust among the campus personnel who are participating in the interviews and not to violate their confidentiality or to convey any information that may negatively impact the staff members.

### **Summary**

Most advocates and campus personnel understand that foster youth success in post-secondary institutions is a complex issue and, while they would like to serve this population of students, they have not been successful in applying models that have been used with other non-traditional student populations. Additionally, data are not readily available from their campuses or from a holistic study that assesses, explores, and explains the current situation and the

supports foster youth need to be successful. Understanding these factors will lead to recommendations on the type of services needed to support foster youth's academic and social achievement at the community college level. The interviews and document analysis will be discussed in the following chapters where I will discuss the findings and the lessons learned from this study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine how California community colleges addressed the needs and special requirements of foster youths on their campuses. A qualitative methodology was used at three community colleges, where both students and staff were interviewed in order to triangulate the findings from multiple perspectives. This chapter is organized by findings related to the research questions across each case analysis. Six overarching themes were identified through analysis of the interview transcripts of 32 students and 9 staff members across the three campuses. The total number of interviewees at Roses Community College (RCC) was 19 with 4 of them being staff. There were 15 interviews at Angeles Community College (ACC) and 4 were staff, and there were a total of 7 interviewees held at Ocean Community College (OCC) with only 1 staff interviewed.

Each campus was asked to provide comparison numbers to ensure the samples were proportional to the total number of foster youth per campus. However, the campuses did not have a formal method of collecting total enrollment numbers for foster youth. Enrollment numbers were based on those currently receiving Chafee funds or those who had self-identified as “wards of the court” on the college application. Accordingly, these numbers were not published with the demographic information provided by the campus. The original intent of the study was to interview five students and one to three staff members per campus. There were more students interviewed at each campus, which was not indicative of the size of enrollment at each school, because those who showed interest were not turned away. Table 1, below, provides information about the foster youth program at each college:

Table 1

*Program Comparison across Sites*

Program Element	RCC	ACC	OCC
Established FY Program	Yes	Yes 2 Full Time 2 Part Time	No
# of FY Program Staff Funded Program	None	Yes	None
Budget	\$50,000 <sup>1</sup>	\$125,000	None
Identified Space on Campus	Off Campus Space	Yes	No
Recruitment Process	Application/Referral	Application/Referral	Application/Referral

<sup>1</sup> Campus leverages General Fund and ILP funding to pay for part time staff positions

The number of staff who worked with foster youth at each campus varied in number and in funding. RCC had a total of eight staff identified as working with foster youth but only four of the eight were funded to work directly with foster youth, and those positions were funded separately. The four part time positions at RCC were paid through general fund dollars given to Financial Aid and grants funded through the Department of Children and Family Services, Independent Living Program. ACC had a total of six staff identified as working with foster youth but only four of the six were funded to work with foster youth and, of the four funded positions, two were only 50% funded. Three of the four staff members interviewed for this study were paid to work directly with foster youth. OCC had one staff position identified to work with foster youth, though that position was not funded for that purpose.

The chapter begins with the research questions, program information, a review of the background questionnaire, and a description of the participants, followed by the six central themes that were identified in the analysis of the data generated from the research questions.

The final section of the chapter is a cross case analysis that highlights the central themes identified across the three cases.

One research question with four sub questions guided this study.

1. How do California community colleges address the needs of foster youth enrolled on their campuses?
  - a. According to former foster youth, what are the challenges they face in accomplishing their educational goals at a community college? What are the differences, if any, in students' perceptions and staff's perceptions about these challenges?
  - b. What supports do foster youth see as having helped their educational progress, i.e., what things do they say aided their transition to college and their attainment of a degree? What supports do foster youth say they needed but did not have?
  - c. According to former foster youth, how knowledgeable are community college personnel regarding the types of support(s) they need to meet postsecondary educational goals? What are the differences, if any, in students' perceptions and staff's perceptions about the types of support(s) they need to meet postsecondary goals?
  - d. How do foster youth describe their college life experience? How connected do foster youth feel toward their college, program personnel, peers, and services on their campus?

These questions were answered in each of the three case studies and through a cross-case analysis of the themes generated through a qualitative coding using NVivo v9.0. The coding of each interview transcript resulted in the generation of six overarching themes. Identification of

the themes was based upon the prevalence of codes from 50% or more of the participants from each of the three community college sites.

Sub questions 1a and 1c were answered by examining both student and staff responses. The remaining sub questions were answered through an analysis of the themes derived from the student interviews. Each theme was defined based on participant comments. Comments that were similar in nature and related to each other in context or situation and showed a pattern were grouped together. While the interviewees did not use the exact same words, comments, and/or perceptions, these codes were categorized and grouped together and helped to shape the story that supported the themes.

Each of the following six themes will be discussed as it relates to the research question it answers. After a review of the six themes, the findings for the study will be presented under the corresponding theme. The six themes are: 1) Factors of discontinuity (instability) due to multiple homes and school placements; 2) Difficulty with transition, especially identifying housing, financial aid, resources and services for former foster youth as well as balancing the demands of school and work; 3) Necessary financial and academic support; 4) Need for programs that facilitate comprehensive support; 5) Access to information and coordination of available resources and services; and 6) Social support and connectedness..

The perceptions and responses of both students and staff regarding the themes of discontinuity (instability) and difficulty with transition from care are captured in the first question. Both students and staff identified the same challenges that foster youth faced in preparing for college and achieving educational goals while transitioning from care. Answers to the second research question showed that financial and academic supports and programs that facilitated comprehensive supports needed to be in place. Moreover, having access to

information and coordination of available resources and services encompasses the perceptions of students and staff answered by the third research question. Lastly, in response to the fourth research question, the theme of social support and connectedness captures the perceptions of the students.

The three sites were Roses City College (RCC), Angels Community College (ACC), and Ocean Community College (OCC). Each case description includes a description of the services provided. As described below, the three sites differed considerably in the size of their campus, the number of former foster youth interviewed, and the resources used to assist former foster youth.

### **Individual Case Studies**

#### **Roses Community College**

A total of 15 students, ten females and five males, and four staff, who were all female, were interviewed and completed a questionnaire for the study. Snowball sampling was used in this study. The ethnic breakdown of the student participants was ten Latinos, three African Americans, and one Asian American, and for the staff it was two Latinas and two African Americans. Initial contact was made with the Dean of Financial Aid and the Community Services Director, who were both informed of the study and agreed to help identify students and staff for the study. The Community Services Director invited me to the monthly Star Program student meeting. During the meeting, I provided an overview of my study and explained that the interviewee target population was former foster youth between the ages of 18-24. I met five students who wanted to participate in the study. The additional 10 students were identified by these five students who wanted to reach out to other former foster youth attending RCC who were members of the student group or who they believed would be interested in the study. Each

student was given a consent form and received a paper and electronic copy of the background questionnaire that was completed before the interview was scheduled and conducted. The students were identified in a relatively short period of time. The original goal was to interview five students per campus, but I received 15 responses from RCC, which gave me the opportunity to expand the sample for this campus.

The background questionnaire asked students about their academic preparedness, course work, length of time in the foster care system, type of housing placement as well as other basic demographic and transition information. The data from the background questionnaire was analyzed along with the interviews for each student and provided a deep understanding of the experiences of the foster youth.

### **Themes.**

***Research question 1a: Foster youth challenges.*** The first research question dealt with the challenges faced by foster youth during their education prior to community college and the differences between staff and student perceptions. The two themes that fall under this research question are 1) Factors of discontinuity (instability) and 2) Difficulty with transition from care.

The data analysis indicated that factors of discontinuity or instability were present in the lives of RCC students. Ten of the 15 students, who were interviewed and completed the questionnaire, said their academic performance prior to community college was negatively affected by their experience in foster care due to the multiple changes in schools and home placements. The two biggest challenges faced by foster youth were attending multiple schools during K-12 and having multiple foster homes. Foster youth regarded this instability as having a profound impact on their academic preparation as well as opportunities for normal experiences that peers who were not in the foster care system were able to have.

I had seven placements and they all sucked. Because of all the different placements I had to also change schools and you know that sucks even more. The problem with school and foster kids is that unless you're in a stable home where you're actually getting back up, advice, and good counsel, you're going to go and screw up, because you're not prepared for school. Something that I've actually come to understand through my philosophy studies is that kids do great when they remain in the same school. They get to know different people, make friends, and know the teachers, and their subjects. Well, when a new student arrives to a new school, he has no friends; he doesn't know how the school works. Well, that kid becomes a loner and the kid struggles. Well, that's what I was forced in to. I continuously lost my friends and my best friend. My best friend said, "You mean you have to move?" I never knew that I was going to lose my best friend. When I moved, I lost contact with my best friend and have never seen him again.

Two-thirds of the 15 students at RCC indicated that housing continued to be a challenge while at the community college. Seven of the students participated in Transitional Housing Programs (THP) during their transition from care while others moved in with extended family, significant others or friends. During the interviews, ten of the students stated that their housing was unstable and led to feelings of instability as they were unable to find "permanent" housing. Even the six students who were still living in transitional housing felt a sense of instability and uncertainty since they knew that soon they would no longer be eligible for THP.

I started applying for THP plusses when my stay at the THP program was going to be over but the waiting list was so long and at the time I had nowhere to go. I was about to be 21 so they were telling me you have to start looking for places. I was going to go back to my foster mom but she had other foster youth so there was no room for me. So I was living with my ex-boyfriend for three months, but I did not want to do that. I didn't want to end up pregnant. I was too afraid to be like my other siblings on drugs or pregnant and then dropping out of school. I was doing so well, but it didn't work out. So I ended up living with some friends, couch surfing for a while. I also lived in Motel Six for about maybe two weeks but that started getting expensive, and I had people helping me and loaning me money. I mean I had no place to go. I had no family. That whole transition was hard for me to try to live in a motel and ask people to live on their couches, it was terrible. I passed all my classes but one throughout that semester, because everything was so hard, you know?

Foster youth also expressed having a difficult time balancing school and work. Nine of the RCC students indicated that balancing school and work was a struggle along with the financial challenges they faced. The review of the transcripts indicated that interviews with RCC

students often took place during the weekend or evening hours and off campus to accommodate work schedules. The pressures of managing a job and school responsibilities were exacerbated by the requirements placed on foster youth to both have a job and attend school in order to qualify for housing.

Staff's perceptions of the challenges that foster youth faced prior to community college were consistent with what foster youth had stated in regards to their educational preparedness. All of the staff at RCC stated that foster youth did not have proper information about the college admissions process. Further, based on a review of student test scores and course selection, the staff determined that students were not prepared for college level courses and needed to take remediation courses prior to taking the transferable courses. The staff stated that they were able to provide assistance to foster youth to some degree when it came to their academic needs; however, three out the four staff members felt that the services they were able to provide were not sufficient to support the needs of foster youth. The same three staff members also shared that housing was a major problem for foster youth and that they, even as staff members, didn't have the necessary resources to mitigate the issue. All four staff indicated that support from outside foster youth agencies was needed in order to address the transitional needs of foster youth.

A major contrast between student and staff perceptions was in regards to the impact that multiple home and school placements prior to transitioning from care had on the youth's educational preparation. When probed about this, all staff on campus stated having had prior understanding about the challenges that foster youth faced in care. However, the staff did not echo the challenges with discontinuity that the foster youth expressed in the interviews. Furthermore, the staff lacked an awareness of the challenges foster youth faced in having to balance both work and school. Finally, although all staff interviewed understood that housing

was a major challenge, they were not aware of the requirements or time limits for transitional housing.

**Research question 1b: Foster youth support at college.** The second sub research question consisted of four parts: (a) support foster youth reported that helped them with their educational progress, (b) support foster youth reported that aided their transition to college, (c) support foster youth reported that aided their achievement of a degree, and (d) the support foster youth reported as lacking. These research sub questions were related to Theme 3: Necessary financial and academic supports and Theme 4: Needed programs to facilitate comprehensive support.

The key factors that helped more than half of the RCC students were the EOP&S program ( $N = 9$ ) and financial aid ( $N = 12$ ). During the interviews, three of the four staff spoke of the informal relationship with EOP&S, financial aid assistance, and the Stars Program for the students. They indicated that slots were made available in EOP&S for former foster youth. A staff member stated,

We have established deadlines to apply for EOP&S for our campus because there are many students that apply to EOPS. Sometimes foster youth are not even thinking about coming to college until like two weeks before the semester and the Star's staff knows that if they do identify a foster youth who can come into EOPS then they bring the application directly over to me, that way we don't have applications coming across the front counter from foster youth. There are strict deadlines but we have this internal process to still try and meet the needs of foster youth even though our public deadline has passed. We still can bring in foster youth for the following semester if we are out of funds. We try and develop some protocol that is behind the scenes that we can work out to help the students take advantage of our program services.

It is important to note that 10 out of the 15 students at RCC also received and used ILP support while attending community college. An ILP case manager held regular office hours on campus to assist foster youth with additional services. The staff member said the relationship with ILP was crucial for students and felt that the regular weekly office hours provided foster

youth with support to identify additional services and resources when needed. Housing was a key factor for ten of the RCC students who indicated it was a challenge to find quality housing.

Consistent with previous findings, financial aid, foster youth programs, and housing assistance were factors that more than half of students reported as being necessary to meet their educational goals. At RCC, the STARS program was noted as helping 10 of the 15 students. There were ten students who indicated they had positive experiences being referred and receiving services on campus. Additionally, 10 students identified the STARS program as providing the linkage and referral to EOP&S, financial aid, and counseling services. In addition, ten students stated that staff directed them to the STARS program when they learned they were foster youth. There were ten students who reported that they did not feel that they had consistent access to tutors or sufficient housing support. One student said:

I know a lot of kids don't know about transitional housing, counseling and we need someone that could actually help us like, you know how EOPS helps you choose your classes but someone to help us with other counseling and stuff 'cause I know I get frustrated about school and everything and I just have to deal with it on my own, and it only gets harder. I wouldn't have known about the Stars Program if I hadn't found out through my roommate. Foster youth don't get a lot of information we have to figure it out. So, it kind of helps when people give you information about stuff you need because if not your lost. It would help if they had a foster youth room where they can help with everything. But the staff has to know how to help us. I usually ask my friends for help because no one here knows how to help me. I am not going to tell staff that I am homeless you know, I just don't want them to know that I am living on the streets especially when they can't help me. I don't want them feeling sorry for me. I am still trying to maintain and get to classes but it would be better if they had information or a place for us to go and get help that is not just about financial aid.

***Research question 1c: Community college knowledge regarding support needed to meet educational goals.*** The third sub research question consisted of two parts: (a) how knowledgeable foster youth indicated community colleges regard the support they need, and (b) the differences between students' and staff perceptions. The responses are related to Theme 5,

access to information and coordination of available resources and services to meet educational goals.

Key findings, in terms of how foster youth feel about whether their community college can provide support, indicate that a little more than half, eight out of fifteen, RCC student interviewees felt they were immediately directed to their foster youth liaison. It should be noted that the majority ( $N = 10$ ) of students felt they were directed immediately to the STARS program at RCC, and a third of the students indicated that they were not. Thus, it may be important to increase awareness of the STARS program at RCC as a relatively easy means of increasing foster youth support. Students at RCC felt that creating a STARS club on campus would attract more foster youth to the program and would be a way for them to access other services. One student said:

I really wanted a club because when I came to RCC there was this connection with adults but there was no connection with other youth my age. That was my biggest thing. How could I connect to other kids that are my age that are going through the same things, what can we do? How can they help me and how can I help them type of thing? That's when I started talking to staff about the club and then I went off and I did it. I'm the one that searched around for other foster youth to sign up for the club. I thought that would be really cool like just connecting with other people, because that's the hardest part. I mean I've been at RCC three years and I only have one friend. I mean my professors are more friends...one of my teachers e-mailed me the other day and she goes like, "Let's go have lunch." But I don't want just that because I need to connect with kids that are my age – I'm 21. I need to tell myself that. You're 21; you don't need to be hanging around with 30-something year olds. But that's where I feel comfortable. I don't feel comfortable with other kids that are my age that don't understand what I have been through.

Services at RCC appeared to be helpful once staff became aware of the students' needs. Still half of students felt that the campus should be more supportive or aware of the challenges foster youth face and provide them with the space and opportunity to meet and access services that could be helpful. The housing issue was the largest negative factor that students felt was not being addressed across the campus; students wanted to have more information about services

that were available to them. Students also reported that although they received financial aid, it was not enough to pay for school and take care of their housing and basic needs. Eight out of the fifteen students at RCC indicated that financial support should have been more substantial and should have included additional funds for housing. At the same time, it is important to note that eight of the fifteen students reported that while the staff did know how to address foster youth needs, they were unable to make the transition from high school to community college seamless.

The analysis of the interviews indicated that the perceptions of students and staff on how knowledgeable staff members were about the needs of foster youth tended to be consistent. However, the difference was in the responsibility of who should provide support for their needs. Even though all of the staff at RCC knew that the challenges foster youth faced centered on housing and financial issues, the staff didn't feel equipped with the resources needed to address the housing challenges. When it came to financial aid, the staff felt equipped to provide support within the guidelines and acknowledged that the aid was not sufficient to address the students' needs. While the staff was aware of the challenges they simply felt that they were limited in scope and resources to address the challenges.

***Research question 1d: Foster youth college experience and connection to campus.*** The fourth sub research question consisted of two parts: (a) how foster youth described their college experience, and (b) how connected foster youth felt to their campus. The following theme of social support and campus connectedness was identified.

Based upon the findings represented in this theme, it appeared that only six out of fifteen RCC students indicated that their experience was positive. It was interesting to note that no students at RCC expressly said that they received support, but eight out of fifteen students did say that counselors helped to make their experiences positive, and six out of fifteen indicated that

the staff made the participants feel like family. These six participants said that they felt connected. One of the six commented:

The Stars staff is so nice, and I have no doubt they are like that with everyone else. They helped me so much and I really do owe them a lot because they answered every single question I had and, you know, I know how busy that office is, and people wait forever and but they...honestly, they helped so much they're pretty much the reason why I'm in school right now. They helped me through every single thing you can think of...filling out applications, finding where to get me more money, talking to me, emailing me, calling me; they were there, like one hundred percent. They call just to check in and see if I am ok. They are always so nice and are always concerned that I am doing ok.

The non-foster youth program staff was found to be helpful with nine out of the fifteen students that were interviewed and students stated that they were helped with both educational and personal goals. However, one-third ( $N = 5$ ) of the students at RCC indicated that their campus staff was not helpful. One of the five noted,

I am taking this class right now through ITV and it's half you have to do by yourself and then you only meet six times with the teacher the whole semester. So, I went to that Department and the person who was there was so mean; she was really rude and I was like, "Oh, I'm sorry" you know, "...it's my first time coming here" and she just wasn't really pleasant you know. She was rude and didn't really understand what I needed. So I just went to the Stars staff, I can always ask them or email them or call them, and I know that they're going to try and help me out.

### **Angeles Community College**

A total of eleven students and four staff were interviewed for this study. Of the eleven students interviewed there were eight females and three male students; all four staff were female. The ethnic breakdown of the students interviewed was as follows: seven Latinos, three African Americans and one Asian; of the staff members interviewed, three were Latinas and one was White. Initial contact was made with the Director of the Guardian Scholars Program to discuss the study and she agreed to help identify students and staff for the study.

During the coding and analysis of the interview data for this campus it was more difficult to group and categorize the codes because the responses varied. But in reviewing the

background questionnaire there was more consistency in the codes. The interview questions were structured to be more open-ended, whereas the background questionnaire was structured to capture a snapshot of the students experience prior to transition. It is possible that the structure of the background questionnaire did not allow for students to identify other barriers they experienced prior and during transition. One of the striking differences between the questionnaire and the interviews was that seven out of the eleven students who completed the background questionnaire felt that their academic performance prior to community college was negatively affected by their experience in foster care because of the multiple changes in schools and home placements compared to the responses during the interview that did not identify one predominant code.

### **Themes.**

*Research question 1a: Foster youth challenges.* The student themes are presented first, followed by those of the staff. The themes that fall under this research question are 1) Factors of Discontinuity (Instability) and 2) Difficulty with Transition from Care.

During the analysis and coding it was noted that there was not one predominant code that a vast majority of the participants indicated as their main challenge at ACC. Students identified a variety of challenges but not one category was mentioned by more than half of the interviewees. A key finding from ACC's case study was that there was a much wider breadth of challenges faced by ACC students as compared to the other two campuses. Through the analysis of the challenges identified it can also be argued that these issues created instability or discontinuity in the life of students. The following three challenges: physical abuse, drug problems, and being phased out of care promoted feelings of instability and discontinuity in the students' lives.

ACC's case analysis identified the difficulties foster youth face as they transition from care. Close to half of the students at ACC had a challenge obtaining housing. At the time of the interview there were two students who were homeless and had difficulty identifying housing referrals. Even though there was not a preponderance of responses found in the interviews, further analysis of the questionnaire and the grouping of challenges helped to support the identified themes. An example of this can be seen in the financial challenges expressed by the students; three of the eleven participants at ACC stated that they experienced financial challenges during the interviews; however, during analysis of the questionnaire responses, it was noted that this campus had seven students who were not eligible for financial aid or who had exhausted Chafee and other financial aid assistance because they had gone to four-year universities or private vocational schools prior to ACC. Even though the questionnaire was only supposed to provide background information, it shed light on a challenge that the interviewer did not probe during the one on one interviews.

Students attending ACC reported balancing work and school simultaneously as a challenge. While only four out of eleven students reported having difficulty balancing work and school, nine of the eleven students were working part-time jobs on or near campus, and one student was working full-time off campus. Students stated that they worked in order to secure housing.

The housing program expects us to do what we need to do. They tell us their expectations and you must have a job, you must go to school and if you don't then you're going to have to leave the program, because this program is designed for you to know how to be independent, not to just depend on us and just live here and not do anything. They emphasize on school, but they're like, "You must work." They're just, "Oh, you need to go to school, you need to go to school," but they feel more concerned about us working and saving money. I feel like for them it's like we need to find a balance between when we need to work and school but they tell us that we need to work and go to school part time. I feel like if the county sees you're pursuing your education and you're trying to go to school and you're doing really good, of course, they're going to help you.

They're used to nothing. It's really hard to find a job and I hear all the time "you must work to stay." But I feel that if I pursue school, there's someone out there that will help me and I will be more prepared to find a better job.

The staff at ACC identified housing and financial aid as major challenges facing foster youth. All the staff responded that even though they were aware of the challenges that foster youth faced they felt that they could only help to some degree. The majority of the staff at ACC stated that even though there were supports on campus they recognized it was not sufficient in meeting the needs of the students. The staff may have been aware of the challenges but felt that the support foster youth needed would have to come from outside agencies because the resources were not available on campus.

***Research question 1b: Foster youth support at college.*** The two primary themes, Theme 3: Financial and Academic Supports Need to be in Place and Theme 4: Programs Facilitate Comprehensive Support, were identified through the analysis.

The three key factors that helped a majority of the students at interviewees at ACC were EOP&S, GSP, and financial aid. Seven of the eleven students identified a need for more counselors. Students in the Guardian Scholars Program have a part-time academic counselor that was hired by the program but they also had access to a general academic counselor and one through EOP&S if they are enrolled in the program. Nine of the eleven students indicated that EOP&S was helpful. The Guardian Scholar Program is centrally located on campus near other student services such as financial aid and EOP&S. This proximity helps both staff and students stay connected. Students mentioned that they have targeted space at the GSP office and are able to access needed services. It was observed that more students rely on Guardian Scholar staff as their first point of contact and they access other counselors or services throughout the campus only when necessary or required to do so. The review of the interviews found that personal

relationships was an important code not just for the success of the youth, but more importantly for students to feel connected to someone invested in their success. Having a counselor that knew them by name, understood their story, and provided guidance to reach their goals, provided the emotional support that many students highlighted as being important in their educational journey. As one student said:

EOP&S helped me with a brief education plan because I'm required to meet with them three times a semester and I did that. But, honestly, the educational plan that the counselor did for me wasn't something I really liked. I felt like she should have gone more in detail with it and not just skim through it really quick, because I have set courses. Because I'm part of Guardian Scholars and I am taking the PD class the counselor already had done one for me and I took it in to EOP&S and I felt like she just kind of copied off of it and I was like I came for like an educational plan from you, not from the GS counselor. But then I realized that the GS counselor knows me more anyway and what I am interested in studying. I felt like she should have done it more in detail but I guess she was too busy and figured I had support somewhere else.

At ACC, the Guardian Scholars program helped nine out of the eleven students. The most significant challenge was housing. Five of the students said the housing assistance needed improvement and it continued to be a challenge. There were four ACC students that indicated this lack of support and stated that the campus needed to be more aware of the services available for foster youth. One student said:

Guardian Scholars, well they just need to know but other staff on campus needs to know a little bit more about foster youth and different procedures like how when you fill out your FASFA and things like that. Different things that we require, they need to know in order for us to be able to stay in college, because at lot times we get disappointed because if we go to a department if we have an issue over...like for financial aid, we have an issue over our parent's information or something and then they don't believe us and like we need a letter from your social worker or DCFS and stuff like that and they make it like we're lying to them that we don't live with our parents. It's like, well, so how do you do it? So, it's like the whole process of going and getting it and then a lot of times kids just lose their motivation to pursue higher education, because of things you have to go through but the Guardian Scholars program helps us to kind of buffer those obstacles we have to go through.

The support and the relationships provided by the Guardian Scholars Program was crucial to understanding the complexity of the issues foster youth faced. On the one hand the students recognized that the staff at the Guardian Scholars knew them better, were invested in what they needed, and helped them navigate community college, yet at the same time, they recognized that the Guardian Scholars could not resolve all of their problems nor did they have the capacity to serve all foster youth on campus. Students ( $N = 6$ ) reported they felt that it was important for staff across campus to know how to work and respond to the needs of foster youth. They did not just want to be referred to a program. The lack of understanding by staff, the constant questioning and lack of connection or relationship building can lead to students becoming more discouraged. Students felt that campus staff members who were not associated with the foster youth program could learn more about their general story so that students could obtain assistance and have their needs met.

***Research question 1c: Community college knowledge regarding support needed to meet educational goals.*** The key findings centered primarily on the need for access to information and the coordination of available resources and services essential to meeting educational goals.

In terms of how foster youth felt about whether their community college could provide support, there were a few important findings. Nearly half of the students indicated that the school should be more aware of the foster youth liaison and stated that they were not immediately directed to their school's foster youth program and that it was important to increase awareness at ACC as a relatively easy means of increasing foster youth support. Students at ACC felt that campus staff should be more aware of the challenges they faced; although, services

appeared to be helpful once provided, more than half of the students consistently stated that the campus should be more supportive to foster youth and to the foster youth liaison (FYSI).

When I went to the financial aid lunch, they had it for like recognizing their workers like different duties they fulfill, a woman went and spoke up and they recognized FY Liaison for helping with all special kids. And as soon as she said that I knew what she was talking about like special, but she said, “Difficult” and I’m like, “What do you mean difficult?” Look at the term she used just then to describe us. I think we’re not difficult we just have a different situation just like every other student that comes on the campus. They just need to learn how to manage it, because if the FY Liaison wasn’t there what would they do if it was their responsibility? A lot of youth that need financial services won’t get them because, apparently, they don’t know how to help them.

More than half of the ACC students consistently reported that there should be more information about services available to foster youth as well as information provided to campus staff about student needs. As highlighted in the quote above, foster youth often feel that they carry a stigma or that others label them as being difficult, even though the majority of the campus staff might not know the nuances of the foster youth experience. Students at ACC did not indicate that campus representatives helped them get services, but did report that the Guardian Scholar staff made the transition seamless for students. The non-GSP staff at the school was mostly found to be helpful and knowledgeable; however, there were some notable deficiencies. Only one-third of the students reported that the staff at ACC recommended appropriate services, and two of the students suggested the staff should receive training in assisting foster youth on campus. While ACC students indicated that the campus staff was supportive and understood the challenges they faced, there were five students who indicated that there were some campus staff members who could have been more supportive or knowledgeable. Similar to the previous finding, nearly half of the students at ACC indicated that the staff should be more aware of the foster youth liaison or the Guardian Scholar program.

The review of staff interviews indicated that all the staff recognized that they had a lack of information on how to address the challenges that foster youth faced. All four staff members indicated that housing and financial aid were the primary challenges but did not mention the other challenges that were identified in the foster youth responses. Even though three staff members recognized that the services available were not sufficient to meet the needs of foster youth, they felt that they had a lack of information and resources to connect the youth to services such as housing, since it was not a resource provided by their campus. In the analysis of the interviews and categorization of the responses there seemed to be a conflict between student perceptions about what staff should know and provide them with and what the staff felt they were able to provide. A majority of the students (N=7) felt that the staff should be more knowledgeable and provide resources, but the staff felt that even if they could acquire more information about challenges the foster youth faced, resources such as housing were not in their purview.

***Research question 1d: Foster youth college experience and connection to campus.***

Theme 6, Social Support and Campus Connectedness was identified. The majority of the students, eight, indicated that their experiences at college were positive and that they received support. This was likely a result of the Guardian Scholars Program as evidenced in the previous findings. The participants indicated that if they felt connected, it was mostly due to the program staff making the participant feel connected or like family. Non-foster youth program staffs were said to be helpful in terms of connectedness by only one ACC student. Five students indicated that they were helped with both educational and personal goals.

For the most part, at schools with foster youth programs, some students were able to build personal relationships and felt supported as indicated by six of the eleven students in the

Guardian Scholars Program. ACC students also reported that GSP counselors helped students feel connected. The Guardian Scholars Program appeared to be universally more helpful but not fully utilized.

### **Ocean Community College**

A total of six students (three female and three male) and one staff were interviewed at OCC. The ethnic breakdown of the student participants was: four Hispanic and two White. Students were identified and contacted through the financial aid staff member who works with the Chafee grant. Students were sent an email and informed of the study. Those that were interested in participating sent me an email and filled out a questionnaire. I scheduled one-on-one interviews to accommodate their schedule. The background questionnaire was completed by all of the students and the analysis highlighted that the responses found within the questionnaires and interviews were consistent with and supported the six themes identified. The questionnaire responses for this campus highlighted that the majority ( $N = 4$ ) of the students did not live in a transitional housing program and that most of them lived in kinship or extended relative care.

#### **Themes.**

***Research question 1a: Foster youth challenges.*** The first research question dealt with the challenges faced by foster youth during their education prior to community college and the differences between staff and student perceptions. The themes that fall under this research question are: 1) Factors of Discontinuity (Instability) and 2) Difficulty with Transition from Care.

Five out of six students indicated their main challenge prior to community college was attending multiple schools associated with having multiple foster homes. It should be noted that only two students indicated experiencing multiple home placements; two other students asked to

Speak about this issue off the record to protect the anonymity of their caregivers. Both had experienced physical and sexual abuse while in placement, and they did not want the families to get in trouble for providing unstable living environments for them while they were in care. The instability with home and school placements made it difficult for students to academically progress in school. These four students stated that they did not graduate from a traditional high school. Only two of the six students were able to graduate on time and from a traditional high school.

OCC's case analysis identified the difficulties foster youth faced as they transitioned from care. There were only two students who were participating in a type of housing program. One student was living in a transitional housing program (THP) and another was living in one of the public housing facilities with his sister, who had also transitioned from care. Both students identified housing on their own without assistance from OCC or from their ILP caseworker. Most students attending OCC also had to balance work and school simultaneously.

The one staff person interviewed at OCC felt that she was limited in the help she could provide foster youth. She understood that housing and financial aid were major challenges but felt that she needed support from other programs on campus and from outside agencies in order to meet the needs of foster youth. The staff member was based in the financial aid office and had little support on campus from other student services. The staff member indicated that she would try and assist the youth in any way she could but was only paid to provide financial aid support.

***Research question 1b: Foster youth support at college.*** The following two primary themes, Theme 3: Financial and Academic Supports Need to be in Place and Theme 4: Programs Facilitate Comprehensive Support were identified during the data analysis.

As noted, OCC did not have a foster youth program to assist foster youth. Counselors were a key factor at OCC, and five-out-of-six students indicated that counselors provided support to foster youth. OCC students associated the Foster Youth Success Initiative Liaison as the counselor that had provided support. As with other schools, the most significant challenge faced was housing; four of six OCC students indicated it was challenging to identify housing options and resources. All of the OCC students said that they were receiving financial aid support from the campus, which was expected because the FYSI Liaison in the Financial Aid Office identified the students recruited for participation in the study. For OCC, tutors and special services or special programs were reported as helping three of the six students achieve their educational goals, including transfer assistance.

OCC students felt that they were provided support on campus even though they did not have a foster youth program on their community college campus. Students were referred to services across campus and tutoring was reported as being the most readily available at OCC as was financial aid. The FYSI Liaison made attempts to establish relationships with coworkers across different departments in order to refer students. She expressed frustration because as the manager of the Chafee grant, she is the only one working with foster youth on campus. She is only responsible for assisting foster youth with their financial aid paperwork. The FYSI liaison felt that it was important to refer them to counseling and tutoring services to help them succeed academically. There were four students who specified that services were helpful once provided and two of the students felt that the campus should be more supportive or aware of the foster youth liaison or of services that could help foster youth. It should also be noted that five of the OCC students felt that the staff provided the most notification of services that were available. Half of OCC students also reported that staff did know how to address foster youth needs.

Additionally, three of the OCC students reported that the campus representative helped the participant get services; the staff was also reported as making the transition to campus seamless.

***Research question 1c: Community college knowledge regarding support needed to meet educational goals.*** Theme 5, access to information and coordination of available resources and services that are needed to meet educational goals, was identified. Students are both positive and negative about how helpful and knowledgeable staff were; however, only two of the six students at OCC felt that the staff were recommending appropriate services, and two students reported that staff was not supportive. However, it is important to note that none of the OCC students indicated that staff should receive training in dealing with and assisting foster youth. Even though there is one staff that is partially dedicated to serve foster youth, she attempts to provide them with as much information and resources as possible. Although she is not required to keep information on the students, she maintains an electronic case file on each student with notes to help her keep track of their needs and sends out information about resources. During review of the interview transcripts students indicated that they received regular email blasts from their FYSI Liaison regarding jobs, activities, services, and resources that might be available or of interest to them. Students also indicated that they contact the FYSI liaison before they attempt to find resources or services on campus in case she may know someone.

***Research question 1d: Foster youth college experience and connection to campus.***

Theme 6, Social Support and Campus Connectedness was identified. Even though OCC did not have a FY program the staff member that worked with the students helped them feel connected. Three students reported feeling connected mostly due to the staff person who made participants feel like family or feel supported. Non-foster youth program staffs were said to be helpful by three students, and two students indicated that their campus staff was not helpful. While three of

OCC students said that they had no relationships on campus, it was not a surprising finding considering the limitations of the program structure at the OCC campus.

### **Cross Case Analysis**

This section of the chapter compares findings for the six student themes across the three community college sites. The staff perspectives are also included. An analysis across these sites was conducted to examine services that were offered by each college.

ACC was the only campus that had a dedicated funding source for their foster youth program. While RCC had the Stars program, there were no funds allocated for the project. RCC has made a commitment to address the needs of foster youth on their campus and the staff has dedicated time to serve youth but they are funded to provide services to all students on campus. At the time of the study, the RCC campus was in the process of identifying staff and location costs associated with the Stars program in order to apply for outside funding. The OCC campus only has one identified liaison that works with foster youth on campus and this person is responsible for students' financial aid. At the time of the study, the OCC campus liaison was trying to identify other campus champions to provide support to the foster youth students.

#### **Research Question 1a: Foster Youth Challenges**

The first research sub question dealt with the challenges faced by foster youths during their education and the difference between staff and student perceptions about these challenges across the three colleges. The theme's codes related to students are presented followed by those of the staff.

The first theme, Factors of Discontinuity, encompassed the challenges foster youth faced because of their academic preparation and in seeking to achieve their educational goals. The instability they encountered resulted from having had multiple schools, multiple foster homes,

problems with the foster care system, and insufficient social worker assistance. Overall, foster youth faced challenges predominately related to changing schools multiple times. This challenge was faced by 53% of the 32 participants. Students at ACC reported changing schools multiple times but the challenges that were faced by ACC students were more diverse than students at the other campuses. It should also be noted that the challenges that were identified at the ACC campus were not identified at any of the other two campuses. The majority of the foster youth at RCC and OCC indicated that they faced challenges in their education due to multiple school placements. The idea of instability and discontinuity was consistent across all campuses, but it was only at ACC that more challenges were presented in the one-on-one interviews.

The second theme deals with the difficulties that foster youth faced when they transitioned from the foster care system. Fifty-three per cent of the foster youth faced challenges at the community college level related to going to school and working.

One important distinction separated RCC from the other two campuses. One-third of the 15 RCC participants perceived that there was a lack of housing support. While many participants across the cases ranked housing concerns as a frequent problem, it seems that only RCC students felt that the lack of housing support prevented them from achieving their pre-community college goals. It is necessary to note that RCC had the largest number of interview participants of the three colleges. Even though foster youth at ACC and OCC also indicated that they struggled with the lack of housing support during transition, it did not impact their community college goals and participation as it did the foster youth at RCC. Even though the housing challenge was also prominent at OCC, with four of the students responding that they had difficulty and continued to have housing challenges, it was seen more with post transition as

opposed to pre-transition. The majority of OCC's students, ( $N = 4$ ), lived in kinship family placements and, after transition, were forced to identify other options for housing.

From the student perspective, the difficulty with transition noted by the participants focused mostly on the three key challenges during community college: financial problems, housing, and having to work and attend school at the same time. This suggests that, from the students' perspective, the community colleges need to provide additional funding and resources to assist students with these challenges in addition to government programs.

Balancing work and school speaks to a major difficulty during the transition from care. The reality that transitional housing is only for a limited time doesn't support a student's progression towards a degree. The pressure to find employment and work in order to save money often overshadows the importance of school. Additionally, the time limits and requirements placed in the transitional housing programs caused more stress and difficulty for students trying to balance the demands of classes and work. The requirements are meant to help students reach self-sufficiency but do not consider the current economic indicators and the need for an advanced degree.

All of the staff said that the challenges for foster youth were housing, financial, and academic experience. The first sub research question asked what challenges foster youth faced, and what differences existed between the perceptions of the staff and students. It can be inferred from the student responses that work and financial issues are related in that greater financial support would probably mean that foster youth would not have to work more than 10 to 15 hours a week and could potentially devote more time to their studies. Students also indicated that the pressures from the work requirement of both programs and the lack of stable housing led them to dedicate more time to work than school.

Differences in staff and student perceptions centered mainly on the fact that the staff did not report being as aware of student work and study issues. This can be attributed to the lack of information that staff have on the requirements of participating in transitional housing programs. It is also important to note that only three out of nine staff members reported that they learned about student foster youth challenges by interacting with them. Six out of the nine staff members learned about FFY challenges from student records, applications, and referrals. At the three colleges, foster youth searched for a more meaningful connection with staff. This difference in staff and student perceptions may mean that the work and study challenges may have been underreported, missed, or simply not communicated to staff because of the lack of communication and information.

#### **Research Question 1b: Foster Youth Support at College**

The second sub research question consisted of four parts: (a) support foster youth reported that helped them with their educational progress, (b) support foster youth reported that aided their transition to college, (c) support foster youth reported that aided their achievement of a degree, and (d) what the lack of support reported by foster youth. The following two primary themes, Theme 3: Financial and Academic Supports Need to be in Place and Theme 4: Programs Facilitate Comprehensive Support, are related to these questions.

According to the third theme, financial and academic supports need to be in place. It was found that 81% of the foster youth perceived that they needed financial aid while 63% stated that EOP&S support was also needed. Across the three colleges, foster youth mentioned the need for counseling (59%) and housing (56%) assistance. Half of the students reported that they needed help from either program (50% of participants). The key code cited by 81% of the participants

was financial aid. EOP&S support, counselors, and housing assistance were also important. For example, a student at ACC said:

Well the Guardian Scholars helped me a lot through the college admissions process and getting classes and financial aid. I was thinking about like what if they weren't there you know? I would be like any other student you know getting bumped around from people here on campus not knowing how to deal with me but since I had their support, I got it and I get support without having to be worried about like stuff not getting completed.

Foster youth need to have the financial and academic support in place so that they are able to stay enrolled and are able to complete their courses and educational goals. Having a liaison or a program that understands the possible challenges that a foster youth might encounter and that has the resources or insight on how to help them complete paperwork and provide backup documentation allows students to navigate college. Almost half (47%) of all student participants at RCC and more than half of all students at ACC (82%) stated that the Stars Program and the Guardian Scholars programs, respectively, were helpful. But 19% per cent of the sample indicated that they did not think the Stars Program or the Guardian Scholars Program was well run. Students at OCC did not have a program like the Stars or Guardian Scholars Program. They only had one staff member on campus to provide support to them. The other assistance that students identified as helping them become more acclimated as community college students included tutors, housing placement, and student support such as financial aid, career and college counseling and academic support. The majority of all students across the two campuses that had programs listed student support services as being important. And the students at OCC who did not benefit from having a program on campus all stated that student support services were needed in order for them to meet their educational goals.

The fourth theme, that programs facilitate comprehensive support, is demonstrated by the responses of the foster youth on the two campuses that had programs and the one that did not.

Across the three campuses, 81% of foster youth indicated that financial aid was an important factor in achieving their degree. Among the other supports identified, 63% of the students felt that EOP&S and ILP support were essential, and 82% of the students said that foster youth programs are needed to achieve their degree. Fifty-nine percent of the students also indicated that counselors should be part of the comprehensive support in meeting degree attainment.

A student stated:

With the Guardian Scholars program they help me along with my educational plan and to see what I have to take for the fall, winter, or spring semesters. They help me a lot with planning and financial aid. That is why I am really happy and I like that I found about them because now I know about all this stuff really early.

The only other mention of a needed support that was expressed by more than five participants across all three campuses was the Chafee grant, with seven participants or 22% stating that the Chafee Grant provided support. Other codes mentioned by smaller numbers of students included a lack of immediate information regarding services and access to tutors. Even though lack of information was mentioned at a smaller rate it is still important to consider. The four students from ACC contended that if the campus was more aware of services for foster youth, students not connected to the foster youth program or liaison on campus would be able to get appropriate services quicker.

Based on the data for second sub question, 69% of foster youth indicated that they need financial aid, and 69% of the students stated that EOP&S support was needed to meet their educational goals. They said they did not receive housing assistance but that they did receive financial support, counselor support, and foster youth program support. Foster youth also indicated that in order to achieve a degree, they needed financial aid, EOP&S support, ILP support, and foster youth programs. The only difference between programs that help students meet their educational goals is that the ILP support is not provided by the campus but rather by

the child welfare system. When analyzing that second research sub question, 53% of the students reported that ILP support stood out as the other support needed.

### **Research Question 1c: Community College Knowledge Regarding Support Needed to Meet Educational Goals**

The third sub research question consisted of two parts: (a) how knowledgeable foster youth perceive community colleges to be regarding the support they need, and (b) the differences between students' perceptions and those of the staff and these questions were addressed by theme 5. The theme of Access to Information and Coordination regarding available resources and services that are needed to meet educational goals was identified.

Fifty-six percent of foster youth said that the foster youth program staff was aware of services needed to achieve their goals and that college staff recommended appropriate and helpful services, yet there was a wide range of opinions expressed by foster youths. The students indicated that some staff members were not supportive, some staff needed training in dealing with or helping foster youth, and that some counselors were good or capable. The availability and success of tutoring was also mentioned. At least half the participants indicated that the staff was knowledgeable.

A little more than half (53%) of RCC students interviewed felt they were immediately directed to their foster youth liaison. This was similar to the responses of the students at the other campuses. However, RCC was reported as having staff that was more aware of their foster youth program than the staff at the other two campuses. ACC students were the least likely to say that they were immediately directed to their school's foster youth program and indicated that campus staff did not help them get services. But the Guardian Scholar staff was reported as making the transition seamless at ACC. Even though the staff at the school was mostly found to be helpful and knowledgeable there were some notable deficiencies. Only one third of the

students at both ACC and OCC reported that staff recommended appropriate services compared to the 66% at RCC. This would support the need for staff training in order to respond to the needs of foster youth on campus.

The staff (100%) perception of their ability to help foster youth was, to some degree, consistent with what the students stated they needed, such as more financial support and EOP&S services. They also understood that housing is a major issue for students. Generally, these findings agree with student perceptions of awareness of their issues and, as a result, there are no large differences between student perception of staff awareness and staff perception of foster youth student needs.

#### **Research Question 1d: Foster Youth College Experience and Connection to Campus**

The fourth sub research question consisted of two parts: (a) how foster youth described their college experience, and (b) how connected foster youth feel to their campus. The theme of Social Support and Campus Connectedness was identified.

Half of the foster youth described their college experience as positive in large part as a result of counselor support and due to the personal relationships they had made with the staff. The support provided to foster youth appears to make approximately half of the participants feel satisfied with their college experiences. Forty-one percent of the students indicated that the staff made them (students) feel like family with respect to their college experiences and only 16% indicated they did not speak much to the staff. In addition, the staff helped with both educational and personal goals.

The theme of positive support and experiences continued with only small differences in proportion between the three campuses. The foster youth did not indicate that overall they felt different than other students; however, it is important to note that 22% of students did not feel

supported. From this cross case comparison it can be noted that at schools with foster youth programs (ACC and RCC) the students were able to build personal relationships and felt supported. ACC's students reported, at the highest rate, that they were helped with both educational and personal goals while at OCC, 50% of students indicated they had no relationships on campus. This difference at OCC is not surprising considering the limitations of the program structure on the campus. Although half of the students indicated that their experiences at college were positive and that they received supports, only two of the six students at OCC indicated that they had a positive experience. Of the three schools, ACC had the highest proportion of students that viewed their experiences as positive and said that they received support. This was likely a result of the Guardian Scholars Program, as the findings suggest. The participants indicated that if they felt connected, it was mostly due to the program staff making the students feel connected or like family. Students at RCC that also had a program on campus also had positive experiences but it was lower at only 53% as compared to the response of ACC students. However, even though more than 50% of students at all three schools felt supported, had access to some programs, counseling, financial aid, or assistance there were still 47% of students across all campuses who felt that improvements could be made. This was found at the two campuses that had a foster youth program and at the campus that only had a foster youth success liaison.

### **Summary of the Findings**

Overall, foster youth appear to feel supported by the financial aid, the EOP&S program, counselors, and foster youth programs (in the two schools with these programs). Additionally, the staff and student perceptions are largely aligned and the differences relate mostly to the perceptions around the requirements that students have to work and go to school simultaneously.

Staff members appeared to be unaware of this challenge. Foster youth experiences were also positive for some in part because of counselor support. One key outcome from this analysis is that while the community college programs (government and campus based) have done a good job in making some students feel supported as they work to achieve their educational goals, nearly half the students in this study did not report feeling that support. One of the biggest unaddressed issues is housing, as neither the staff nor student participants suggested a potential solution. But one concern that can be addressed and was found to be the most important finding is the need for foster youth to have consistent and meaningful support at the start of community college and during their community college experience. In Chapter Five, I will discuss the conclusions and provide recommendations for campuses that are interested in working with foster youth.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the independence achieved at the age of 18 may be an exciting turning point for some young adults throughout the nation, this is often not the case for foster youth. The transition to adulthood for foster youth is accompanied by considerable pressure to decide on their future (Collins, 2001; Courtney, 2001). The focus of these foster youth does not involve the excitement of moving out of the parental nest or enrolling in college, but rather on how to support themselves and where to live at a confusing time in their lives. Many foster youth are overwhelmed by the basics of the higher education pathway and ultimately do not enroll in college. Even though foster youth are eligible for Independent Living Skills (ILP) assistance, the information and support that ILP provides is not comparable to a supportive nurturing relationship that they can rely on for help in case of emergencies. Additionally, ILP assistance requirements may not take into account the challenges that foster youth face while trying to navigate higher education. Studies have found that most 18-year-olds who are in college can rely on their families for support. Without parents, role models, guidance counselors, or a social network in place, problems that are manageable for most people, become overwhelming and life changing experiences for foster youth (Shirk & Stangler, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to capture the experiences of former foster youth currently attending community colleges in Los Angeles County. The study looked at the needs of foster youth in community college by looking at programs that were created to assist foster youth in meeting their educational goals. This study was conducted at three California community colleges: Rose City College, Angeles City College and Ocean Community College. The data

was collected during a two-and-a-half month period to allow for availability amongst staff and students. The participants were both students and staff members and the researcher spent three and half weeks at each site gathering sufficient documents and conducting observations. A total of thirty-two students and nine staff members were interviewed at the three campuses. The collected information was used to generate data and themes that helped to answer the research questions posed for this study. The analysis identified six themes that emerged from the research questions. Based on these themes and the answers to each of the sub research questions there were a total of eight findings. The next section will provide a summary of all the findings.

This chapter contains seven sections and will begin with an overview of the findings, followed by an analysis of the findings as they connect to the research questions and relevant literature in the field. Next, the chapter will offer recommendations to both child welfare and higher education institutions interested in helping foster youth meet their postsecondary goals. The other sections will highlight the implications and the limitations of the study as well as provide recommendations for future research and will conclude with the researcher's personal reflection.

### **Analysis of the Findings**

The eight findings were consistent across the three colleges with the exception of two that only pertained to two campuses. These differences will be explained later in the chapter. The findings are presented as it relates to each of the research sub questions followed by the analysis.

### **Challenges in Accomplishing Educational Goals: Youth and Staff Perceptions**

The first research question asked foster youth and staff to identify the challenges foster youth faced in meeting their educational goals and the differences, if any, between student and

staff perceptions of these challenges. There were three findings relating to this research question that were consistent across all of the campuses.

The first finding that was identified was that “Foster youth faced challenges with their educational preparation resulting from multiple schools and multiple foster homes placements prior to aging out of care.” This was the single biggest challenge students faced prior to their transition from foster care. The placement in multiple schools and/or homes, caused considerable disruption in the lives of students. This constant instability made it difficult for students to complete courses, fulfill college admissions requirements, and obtain college information. Even more disheartening, the students did not get the required academic support needed to acquire the skills necessary to be successful in college.

The second finding that was identified was that “Foster youth faced challenges at the community college level relating to having to balance school and work at the same time while also dealing with housing and financial challenges.” After transition from care, foster youths were most challenged by having to work and go to school at the same time as well as dealing with housing and financial issues. Foster youth were faced with competing priorities and often times that made it difficult for them to concentrate on their academics. The pressure to secure housing often caused students to have to choose work over school especially since one of the housing requirements was verification of employment.

The third finding was that “Staff perceptions of the challenges that foster youth faced was consistent with what youth listed; housing, financial, and academic preparation, however staff did not identify balancing work and school as a challenge for foster youth.” It can also be observed that the main difference between student and staff perceptions was that the staff did not report being as aware of the students’ work and study issues. It should also be noted that the

staff's knowledge about student foster youth challenges was not derived by interacting with them. Since records, applications, and referrals comprised the vast majority of how the staff reported learning about foster youth challenges, the work and study challenges may have been underreported, missed, or not communicated.

The findings of this study supports the work by Finkelstein et al (2002), which finds that foster youth are faced with obstacles that greatly impact their academic performance. According to the same study, the obstacles were noted as the reasons for the poor academic performance of foster youth. Finkelstein's study highlighted six challenges for foster youth: maintaining ties with biological parents and siblings, mandated court appearances, doctor's appointments, school transfers, behavioral issues, and avoiding social interactions with peer groups in order to hide foster status. Finkelstein's data supports this study's findings, which suggest that foster youth were mostly challenged by having multiple school and home placements while in high school. The foster youth in this study did not overwhelmingly identify Finkelstein's other points as having had an impact on their academic performance. While Finkelstein's study focused on foster youth still in care and in high school, this study focused on foster youth currently attending college. However, it was important to ask questions about the students' transition and pre-college experience because it was important in understanding why their college readiness was distinctly different from non-foster youth.

For foster youth, the challenges of managing multiple priorities and time demands while trying to reach educational goals are partially imposed by the foster care system. The transitional housing program requires students to work while attending school at the same time. The housing programs require students to work so that they have the money to find their next housing placement when their time has expired. But working often conflicts with the student's

coursework and study schedule. Because placement through the housing program is not permanent, students are more likely to feel unsettled, which does not allow them to focus on their education. Balancing both work and school can be a hard adjustment for any college student, but for foster youth, this requirement adds more stress and instability. These are the reasons why foster youth are having difficulties in accomplishing their educational goals at the community college level.

The findings in this study were also aligned with the Pecora (1997) study, which stated, for foster youth, the barriers to college success are a lack of access to tuition, financial support, housing, and health and mental health support. Instead of concentrating on their studies, foster youth are more focused on issues of survival such as housing and financial stability. My study observed that at the three colleges, the staff was unaware that foster youth were having difficulties with balancing work and school, which is why the perceptions of the staff and foster youth students differed on this issue. However, the staffs were aware that students dealt with survival issues but did not feel that they were adequately trained or prepared to address the issues students faced. The mission of the campuses was to provide educational support as it relates to financial aid, counseling, and tutoring. It appeared that survival issues such as adequate housing should be addressed by outside entities because these are factors that are outside the campus' control and campus staff did not have the resources to address these issues. As this study found, foster youth wanted personal relationships and the feeling of connectedness. Many of the students expressed that program staff were more in tune with their needs and stories than other campus staff. However, when it came to survival concerns, the staff failed to ask students what additional barriers they were experiencing. Staff members did not know that some of their students were homeless. The staff did not have sufficient background information on the

students nor did they probe to identify what were the outside factors or survival concerns that were impacting a student's situation. Even when staff knew that several students were homeless, staff struggled with identifying resources for the students and felt that housing and job placement did not fall into their domain. These factors have put a strain on the relationships between staff and students but also show that there has been a lack of understanding of youth experiences and staff responsibilities, a lack of information regarding transition resources, and conflicting expectations from both students and staff. The individual foster youth experience will not be understood through a referral or application process alone. Building the relationships and communication between staff and students will expose the additional struggles and needs of students.

Yu (2002) concluded that one of the biggest barriers to the success of students were the lack of stability in school placements and inconsistent social workers. Yu's study supported the finding that foster youth felt the impact that multiple homes and school placements have had on their academic performance. Additionally, the students felt that they were not given adequate or accurate information on how to apply for college. Yu (2002) found that a barrier to foster youth success is the lack of collaboration between child welfare agencies and schools. This study, on foster youth's experience in community college, did not necessarily focus on the collaboration between child welfare agencies and schools, but Yu's idea correlates with the finding that multiple home and school placements have had an impact on foster youth's academic performance during high school, as well as their academic preparedness for post-secondary education. Even though foster youth didn't specifically state that their multiple placements were due to a lack of collaboration between child welfare agencies and schools, it can be inferred that there was a general lack of collaboration between all parties involved. More effort and

coordination should have taken place between child welfare agencies and schools in order to mitigate the multiple school placements that foster youth experienced. Additionally, the instability foster youth experienced also impacted critical financial aid timeline requirements, which negatively affected student aid. This idea of the lack of collaboration also supports the finding that community college staffs were unaware of the work and study balance struggle foster youth were experiencing, one of the themes that emerged from the study. This is a critical issue since studies have shown that no single person or institution was responsible for the educational needs and quality of the student's educational preparation or degree attainment.

Based on their data Yu et al. (2002) argue that a foster youth without a quality education does not have post-transition success. In recent years, the Stuart foundation sponsored a series of three studies that looked at the transition of foster youth from high school to college and highlighted the educational disparity of foster youth amongst other student populations. In the report "First Look Foster Youth Education Outcomes in Four California Counties" Frerer et al. (2011) highlighted that even compared to other at-risk youth populations foster youth still fell behind academically. This study is an important contribution to the field because before this report, most foster youth support programs were created based on other at-risk youth programs. This study shows that foster youth face unique challenges and emphasizes that these students need more support in high school in order to make a successful transition to community college and other post-secondary institutions. Further, it asserts that without the proper academic support, resources, and support prior and during transition, foster youth will continue to enroll in lower numbers than other students and, additionally, will have a more difficult time matriculating through college (Frerer, 2011). Community College staff can benefit from understanding the experiences of foster youth prior to transition and the challenges they face

once they are out of care, providing insight to the challenges foster youth face which are different than the general population of students and other at-risk students as well. The Stuart Foundation studies (2011, 2013) support the finding that foster youth experienced difficulties as they transitioned from care, recurring theme in this study. The students indicated that there was a lack of institutional support prior to emancipation and, often, a lack of support immediately following emancipation.

This theme was a key finding in this study because, as highlighted in the analysis of the literature, most studies only focused on the challenges that foster youth encountered during their transition from care but did not address the types of supports needed for former foster youth to be successful at post-secondary institutions. The challenges of transition and the support needed highlight the differences between the staff and student perceptions with regards to the survival issues. There are supports that campus staff felt that they were responsible for providing, but the basic survival skills that foster youth consistently highlighted, as challenges to their success were not provided by the campus. This is consistent with Yu's observation that the lack of collaboration between higher education and child welfare agencies will further compound the challenges students face. This lack of collaboration does not provide a clear understanding about whom or what is ultimately responsible for providing these supports.

Generally speaking, there has been very little study of the educational experiences of foster youth. The Courtney et al. (2001) study suggests that despite the interest shown by policy leaders and child welfare advocates, little is known about what happens to foster youth after they "age out" from care, but there has been a growing interest in the educational outcomes of foster youth since the passage of AB 490: Ensuring Educational Rights for Foster Youth in 2004. Currently, the Stuart Foundation and the Center for Social Services Research are studying post-

transition foster youth experiences in order to provide feedback to the child welfare agencies and Independent Living Programs (ILP) charged with preparing youth to become self-sufficient. Students in this study expressed that they did not feel supported in identifying housing and that they only utilized ILP services for books, clothing, or transportation vouchers. The data showed that two campuses worked with ILP in order to try and connect students to resources. But students across all three sites said that ILP services did not prepare them to survive on their own, that the workshops were not timely or realistic, and that there was limited assistance and resources to find suitable housing.

The Barth (1990) study and Courtney's (2001) study supported this finding regarding Independent Living Programs. ILPs were created due to legislation intended to provide foster youth, who are still in care during their adolescence, with guidance and support in order to build necessary life skills to live independently and attain self-sufficiency. Barth's study found that foster youth wanted ILP classes to include information and practical experience on financial management, job preparation, and educational opportunities (1990). Foster youth in Barth's study felt that they had insufficient opportunities or experiences to help them prepare for independence. They asked for transitional housing programs that would allow them time to practice independent living skills while they were being financially supported (p. 14). Barth's findings echo the challenges that students in this study reported having with ILPs as well as their relationships with ILP caseworkers, which varied drastically across the three school sites. There was not one school where student's reported having had more support from ILP or access to resources that were crucial for their survival yet, when the staff was asked about the relationship and access to ILP and it was reported that students were receiving services and that the staff had attempted to provide space on campus for an ILP caseworker. The disconnect can be addressed

by cross training school staff and ILP caseworkers so that the challenges foster youth face can be addressed, campus and child welfare staff know and understand which resources are provided by each institution, students do not have to individually advocate for support. As a result, regardless of who students interact with, both college and child welfare staff will know how to provide the services that foster youth need to be successful in school. It was evident from the interviews that many staff had a strong desire to assist foster youth in identifying resources but that within the scope of their work they did not have the resources, time or the knowledge of how to address these concerns. The research by Cooper et al. (2008) and Dworsky et al. (2009) supports the conclusion that each system concentrates on their own services. Providing the space and the cross – system collaboration between all institutions could help to integrate or connect resources for students.

### **Support Services Needed for Educational Success**

The second research questions asked foster youth to identify the type of supports they needed to meet their educational goals and there were two findings that related to this research question. One of the findings only related to two campuses because both had a foster youth program on campus.

The first finding in this section identified was that “Foster youth from ACC and RCC indicated that having a program focused on foster youth on campus was important for their success in meeting their educational goals.” These two campuses had an established program and students felt that the dedicated program supported their needs as students and as foster youth. Student’s felt more connected to the foster youth program on campus because they felt that it understood more about their challenges than the rest of the campus.

The second finding in this section “Foster youth indicated that they need financial aid; EOP&S support, ILP support, counselors, housing assistance, and foster youth programs to meet their educational goals and to achieve a degree” indicated that the students identified all of the supports that were needed in order to be successful in meeting their educational goals. If these supports are provided, it will be easier for foster youth to attain their desired educational goals since these are the supports that can help them in addressing the challenges they face during their time at school.

These two findings are in agreement with Merdinger & Tweed’s (2002) study that reported that foster youth were not academically prepared for college and had not been informed of their options to attend post-secondary institutions. This research shows that the most influential factors that prompt foster youths’ decisions to continue on to college is information about financial aid, college application and college requirements, and the importance of succeeding in college preparation classes while in high school. This means that it’s critical for foster youth to have financial aid and supports from counselors that can help inform them in terms of the college application process. It is important for foster youth to be guided and supported by the staff and counselors so that they will know what to do and how to deal with the obstacles they may face.

With these supports, foster youth may be more able to accomplish their educational goals and be motivated to pursue a degree. The Casey Foundation framework on “Supporting Success: Improving higher education outcomes for students from foster care” (2010) calls upon post-secondary campuses to improve their program design in terms of sharing information and guidance on where to get assistance. Students that are connected to services such as financial aid, counseling, academic advising, housing, tutoring, and social supports are more likely to graduate

and stay enrolled in the university. This information helped in accessing the programs and addressing the needs of foster youth to help in attaining educational goals. Merdinger's data and findings resonated with what students and staff in this study said about academic preparedness, lack of information, and resources.

The study by Cooper et al. (2008) also supports the finding that with critical supports in place at the community college foster youth can be successful. The study found that if the campus staff had an understanding of the foster youth experience and the "appropriate methods" for assisting foster youth and provided assistance during a time that students could access the services, it would help students meet their educational goals (p. 12). The study also found that it was important for campuses to design a program that addressed the unique needs of foster youth and connected with more services on campus in order to provide the needed support. This study also supported the finding that students need a program that addresses their unique needs.

Cooper et al (2008) studied programs that were similar to the type of support found at OCC's campus. None of the campuses in Cooper et al.'s (2008) study had a program like Guardian Scholars or the Stars Program. The study found that the campus staffs felt that they were not addressing all the needs of students and that there were limited resources allocated to serve the needs of foster youth. The study found that it was important to co-locate ILP staff on the college campus as well as develop partnerships within the college community and external community (Cooper, 2008).

### **Staff's Knowledge, Access and Coordination of Available Resources and Supports**

The third research question asked foster youth how knowledgeable community college staffs were regarding the types of support(s) they needed to meet their post-secondary

educational goals and explored the differences between staff and youth perspectives. There were two findings related to this research question.

The first finding in this section was that foster youth indicated that foster youth program staffs were aware of the services they needed to achieve their educational goals and that college staff recommended services that were appropriate, but when it came to housing and employment support, staffs were not prepared to provide services. The second finding was that staff perceived that they were able to help foster youth to some degree but recognized that foster youth needed more financial support than they were given and that housing was a major issue for which they were not prepared to provide resources or support.

The findings above suggest that campus staff and students have the same perception in terms of the types of supports that are needed to meet post-secondary educational goals. This also means that financial support and housing issues are the main problems faced by students and should be addressed. This supports findings from Merdinger's (2002) study that states that foster youth need to be aided financially and to be provided housing and EOP&S services. Former foster youth can be motivated when given the support they need because they will be able to focus more on attaining their educational goals. In addition to this, motivating foster youth can help in easing the dropout rates at community colleges. This is in line with the Frerer et al. (2011, 2013) studies which argue in order to support the needs of foster youth, colleges will need to develop programs that address the students' unique needs and not assume that programs that support at-risk students will meet the needs of foster youth. Therefore, although the past literature found that the needs of these foster youth were similar or the same as other at-risk student populations, the recent literature has found this not to be the case. Foster youth's experiences more often vary depending upon individual student needs and circumstances.

Cooper et al. (2008), Dworsky et al. (2009), and Frerer et al. (2011, 2013) all suggested that a campus program that supports foster youth should be developed based on students unique challenges and experiences in order to provide the needed resources to help them succeed in meeting their educational goals.

The report “Hopes & Hurdles California Foster Youth and College Financial Aid” by Cochrane and Szabo-Kubitz (2009) identified another critical issue in meeting the financial needs of foster youth. The foster youth and staff in this study all stated that the amount of financial aid was not sufficient in meeting their needs as students. In the program description and the foster youth success initiative liaison manual it was often stated that foster youth are entitled to receive up to \$14,000 in financial aid between California State Aid, CHAFEE, and the Pell Grant. However, the Cochrane and Szabo-Kubitz study found that less than four percent of foster youth who completed the FAFSA received all three of the grants (2009). According to the study, foster youth are receiving less aid than they are eligible to receive because the impact of constantly changing schools makes it difficult for them to obtain the cumulative GPA required to receive California grants; further, it hinders the student’s ability to establish the necessary relationships in high school with counselors or teachers, who would assist them with college and financial aid requirements, and timelines. The study also supported what staffs said about foster youth on their campuses in that they applied for financial aid very late and didn’t understand the requirements. Cochrane and Szabo-Kubitz (2009) also found that foster youth had a difficult time in getting all of the documents required in order to be deemed eligible and often times didn’t know what to do or where to go to get the proper documentation. This study shed light on why students might not be getting their aid. It is important that staff and students understand these hurdles so that foster youth students can access as much aid as possible.

## **Foster Youth Community College Experience and Connectedness**

The final research question asked foster youth to not only describe their college life experience but also inquired about how connected youth felt towards their campus and staff. There was one finding that represented all of the campuses: Foster youth described their college experience as positive in large part as a result of program staff support, positive relationships with staff and because they were made to feel like family.

The last sub question tackled the connection of foster youth towards college, program personnel, peers, and services on campus. It can be observed that positive support and experiences continued after initially being motivated to obtain a degree with only minor differences in proportion. Overall, the foster youth did not indicate that they felt connected to campus as a whole but felt that they did have individual support from specific staff members. This means that positive support such as staff checking in with students, caring about their progress, and showing concern for them can help students be more connected with their external surroundings. This can also help them be more aligned with their environment, which leads to educational attainment as well. Davis' study acknowledged that there was a lack of research on the experiences of foster youth once they begin their college career and the struggles that they encountered while completing their degrees. However, it was noted that foster youth are not connected to a support network, which for most students is typically their families. For Davis, this is a critical point and supports the recommendation that foster youth need targeted programs to support them on the college campus. This also showed that the more staff helped students to become motivated, the more they will work on attaining their educational goals and will be more proactive in meeting their school requirements.

Overall, foster youth say they feel supported by the financial aid office, the EOP&S program, counselors, and/or foster youth programs (for the two schools where such programs existed). The staff perceptions and student perceptions are largely aligned, with the differences related mostly to the perceptions regarding the difficulty students have simultaneously balancing work and school, which the staff appeared to be unaware of. This again supports the idea that campus staff need more training on foster youth experiences but also need to design programs intended to meet the needs of these students. Although all of their needs were not met, foster youth stated that they had positive experiences largely in part because of the counselor support they had on campus. In regards to the work/school balance issue, it is important to recognize that while other community college students experience similar challenges with work and school, it is more significant for the foster youth population because it is connected to their housing and stability. If they do not work they are not allowed in some of the transitional housing programs, and they will be unable to pay their rent. This can be life altering for youth who do not have the resources or support a family can provide.

One important outcome from my study is that while the community college programs (government and campus based) have done a good job in making some students feel supported as they aim to achieve their educational goals, but nearly half the students reported feeling unsupported. One of the biggest unsolved issues is housing, as neither the staff nor student participants indicated a potential solution. The provision of a fixed service such as housing is more difficult to increase than the number of counselors in training. This is congruent with Cooper et al.'s (2008), Dworsky et al.'s (2009), Frerer et al.'s (2011, 2013), and Wolanin's (2005) studies that suggest that most institutions have responded to foster youth by using existing programs as the center of the foster youth support programs at four year institutions, citing, for

example, the use of EOP&S programs, which are traditionally geared toward helping low-income minority students gain access to and meet their educational objectives at post-secondary institutions. In order to meet the needs of foster youth on community college campuses, more attention will need to be given towards the unique experiences and challenges that foster youth face and creating programs that address the students' needs.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Increase Educational Planning and College Awareness amongst Social Workers, Caregivers, and Foster Youth**

The study found that foster youth felt they did not have adequate preparation for college, were not provided with information about the required courses to take, or other requirements for college. Many of the students stated that this lack caused confusion and contributed to the stress they experienced at the time of transition. Social workers and caregivers should be trained to provide high school graduation requirements, A-G course requirements, college admissions, and financial aid to foster youth. A major reason for this lack of adequate information is that foster youth are constantly moving from one home and school placements to another. It is important that child welfare social workers don't rely on schools or foster youth to access their own college and career information. The more social workers and caregivers are informed about college requirements and timelines, the more they will be able to support foster youth in making informed decisions during their transition from care and into post-secondary institutions. The instability that foster youth experience also affects important requirements of the college admissions process. Specifically, students might not get all of their credits recognized, might not be at a school in time or long enough to earn the required cumulative GPA for admission and financial aid. Students might also miss out on valuable test preparation and college awareness counseling that is important in helping a young person successfully transition to college.

## **Encourage Co-case Management between Unified School District Social Workers and DCFS Social Workers to Identify Foster Youth Who Need More Educational Support**

The City of Los Angeles Community Development Department and Los Angeles Unified School District have a partnership that co-funds Pupil Services and Attendance Counselors (PSA) in the City's Workforce Investment Act YouthSource centers. The PSAs are dropout prevention counselors who are placed in the community centers and have access to student records. The counselors assist the centers in identifying dropouts, conducting an educational assessment, pulling transcripts from schools they have attended, and reconnecting them back to school by finding the most appropriate educational setting for them to either earn their high school diploma or GED. Once students receive their diploma or GED, the YouthSource center staff work on enrolling students into post-secondary institutions. LAUSD also has a group of three PSAs that work with 8,000 foster youth, providing advocacy regarding students' educational rights and information regarding resources students and caregivers might need. However, it is important that DCFS work more strategically with LAUSD to create a similar program in which they not only identify foster youth that are at risk of not graduating but also work with the district to identify those who have dropped out of school and provide a co-case management approach to getting youth back in school and on track to graduation. Another important role that this partnership can play is in providing some continuity for youth who often times are not provided a stable high school environment. A partnership of this nature could possibly work to mitigate the problems caused by multiple school placements that the youth are experiencing and could provide support in accessing much needed college awareness information. LAUSD and other districts performed a data match with DCFS in order to identify the amount of students that are in the schools but a more coordinated relationship is needed to ensure that that foster youth are getting the proper interventions and supports. This will become

increasingly more important with the new Local Control Funding Formula guidelines that will give schools more money if they serve a large percentage of foster youth on their campuses.

DCFS and LAUSD should identify which services they each can provide foster youth to ensure that students are meeting high school graduation requirements, on track to attending post-secondary institutions, and that the programs are not duplicating services and have the ability to reach more students with limited resources.

### **Child Welfare Social Workers Should Work to Find More Suitable Placements to Reduce the Multiple School Placements that Foster Youth Experience**

Foster youth indicated that the multiple school and home placements that they are subjected to does not support preparation for college, career, or transition. There are laws protecting the educational rights of students that indicate that youth should stay in one school. However, the lack of placements around their schools makes it difficult for foster youth to maintain stability. Child welfare systems should identify suitable placements and provide extensive caregiver training on how to deal with adolescent development and be encouraged to provide youth with long term housing as opposed to having them leave at the first time a student acts out. When students were probed about the multiple home placements, overwhelmingly, they responded that they had difficulty with their foster families because they acted out. Intervention, training, counseling, and more thoughtful placement options should be considered before reacting and immediately removing a foster youth from placement.

### **Cross-train Caregivers, Social Workers and Community College Staff on College and Transitional Resources Available for Foster Youth**

Cross training and collaboration is even more urgent with the passage of Assembly Bill 12 California Fostering Connections to Success Act, which extends foster care benefits to youth between the ages of 18 and 21. This bill also provides CalWorks benefits to eligible foster youth

beyond age 18 and up to the age of 21 when they are placed with an approved relative and not eligible for federal foster care benefits (AFDC-FC). This bill is important to this study for the following reasons: According to the Assembly Bill Primer, in order to receive benefits after the age of 18, a youth must meet ONE of the following participating requirements:

1. Completed high school or equivalent program (i.e., GED); OR
2. Enrolled in college, community college or a vocational education program (half-time enrollment, as the college, community college or vocational program defines half time enrollment); OR
3. Employed at least 80 hours a month (this must be paid employment); OR
4. Participating in a program or activity designed to remove barriers to employment (this is the “safety net” category which is intended to capture all youth who are not eligible under the employment or education conditions).

Previous legislation has required higher education institutions and child welfare agencies to work together. However, AB 12 could provide youth support to address the primary issue they stated as a major barrier to their success in community college: housing and difficulty with transition. Researchers should study how Los Angeles County community colleges and LA County Department of Child welfare and Family Services will work together to collaborate and identify resources to make sure that foster youth have the appropriate supports to meet their educational goals. There should also be a focus on cross training between the two systems and building the capacity of staff in both institutions.

### **Co-locate DCFS Youth Development Specialists on Community College Campuses**

The co-location of DCFS Youth Development Specialists on campus would be a tremendous resource for the students, the community college system, and child welfare institutions. During

and after transition, foster youth have a difficult time accessing resources and knowing what ILP and housing services are available to them. Having child welfare staff on the community college campus will provide the resources with which the campus and staff are not equipped or prepared to provide. There are housing and supportive services that students need in order to meet their educational goals. Community colleges have not had to deal with the large-scale housing issues they have encountered with the foster youth population. Additionally, having access to child welfare staff on campus can prove to be mutually beneficial because campus staff would be able to gather additional information needed for financial aid, and child welfare can keep better track of foster youth.

### **Encourage the Development of Supportive and Transitional Housing Options for Foster Youth near Community College Campuses**

There are between 1,200 and 1,800 youth who transition out of care each year in Los Angeles County alone, and there are only 900 transitional housing beds per year. Even with the passage of AB 12 and extending the in care age to 21, the County of Los Angeles will still need to create more transitional housing options for foster youth. The County of Los Angeles should develop transitional and permanent supportive housing around community college campuses to make it easier for students to attend post-secondary programs. Having housing options around a community college will promote one of the goals of AB 12, which is to provide access and support completion of post-secondary goals. The overwhelming response of youth in this study was about the lack of housing and the negative impact that this lack played on them meeting their educational goals. Providing foster youth with housing near their community college campus can provide a continuity that allows them to establish a sense of community and belonging. Time limits can coincide with degree progression and depending on their career or

college goals they can either transfer to a four-year college or move directly into student or permanent housing.

### **Provide Early Work Experiences and Connection to Workforce Development Programs for Foster Youth**

The foster youth in this study also indicated that one of the biggest issues they faced was balancing work and school responsibilities. Child welfare and community colleges should establish relationships and collaborate with workforce development agencies funded with Workforce Investment Act dollars. There is a big push to ensure that all youth are college and career ready. Establishing relationships with workforce providers will give youth access to part time employment and internship opportunities that can mitigate some of the transitional housing requirements but also provide youth with a connection to employers that hire young adults who are currently in school. This collaboration can also provide additional funding and resources to youth who are interested in education and training. The Workforce Investment Act funding requires that a minimum of 25% of the funding be spent on training and education. These funds can help pay for some of the development courses the youth must take in order to become academically prepared for post-secondary education.

### **Create and Fund Guardian Scholar Programs on Community College Campuses that Can Provide Support to Foster Youth in Meeting Educational Goals**

Child welfare and public service agencies are focusing more on foster youth; therefore, community college personnel should establish policies and build out programs that will meet the needs of their foster youth population. The intended goal is to help retain youth on campus and help provide resources to youth so that they can continue with school despite the obstacles they may encounter while pursuing their degrees. It can also be helpful to develop programs that personally address the needs and concerns of foster youth so that they do not get stuck or drop

out because they are having a hard time dealing with housing or financial problems. The established programs should also focus on ways to keep youth motivated, engaged in their learning, and help create a sense of belonging. Also, the foster youth programs should engage in internal and third party evaluation to not only identify the needs and concerns of foster youth but to also identify best practices to help support foster youth in meeting their educational goals.

### **Increase the Financial Aid Awards of Foster Youth**

The majority of the students in this study reported that their financial aid awards were limited or that they did not qualify for all of the grants. During the interview of staff and in reviewing state and local financial aid guides, it is reported that foster youth, between Cal Grants, Pell Grants, Chaffey and the Board of Governors Fee Waiver, are eligible to receive up to \$14,000 a year while attending a community college. Unfortunately, many students reported that they were not receiving their full aid due to eligibility requirements and when they had applied.

### **Implications**

The findings from this study filled a gap in the literature and addressed the need to have studies that focused on the experiences of foster youth attending community colleges. This study provides needed information to researchers, advocacy groups, and colleges about the needs of former foster youth at the post-secondary level. This study is unique in that it highlights how colleges in Los Angeles County are addressing the needs of former foster youth on their campuses. This chapter also made specific recommendations for ways to help former foster youth transition to a two-year college along with the types of supports foster youth stated they needed to be successful. Additionally, this study identified the challenges foster youth face in balancing work and school and the requirements that are in place to help them meet

independence from care. These insights can help campus and child welfare staff to understand key components that are required for programs that target foster youth. This study can help campuses understand the challenges foster youths face in accomplishing their educational goals at the community college level. The description of the connections between foster youth with regard to their college, program personnel, peers, and services on their campuses can assist staff with helping students have a better college experience.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The number of participants in this study is small. A larger number of participants and a larger number of community colleges would be helpful in drawing generalizable conclusions about foster youths in community colleges. As such, the conclusions made in this study are applicable to the three campuses that were in the study and possibly to community colleges with similar attributes and students. The three colleges selected are similar to many other California Community Colleges in terms of demographics and size, but the findings are not applicable to the entire state of California.

A second limitation of this study was that it did not include interviews with child welfare agency and primarily Independent Living Program staff. It is possible that these interviews could have shed light on some of the findings in this study as well as identify some of the challenges both institutions face in providing services and supports to foster youth who are attending community college.

A third important limitation is that campuses do not know how many foster youth are currently enrolled at their campuses since it is a self-reported category and an answer is not required. Because of this, it was not possible to determine what proportion of former foster youth was interviewed at each of the three campuses.

## **Recommendations for Future Study**

There are a wealth of studies concerning program models that support at-risk youth and literature that addresses issues of transitions and resiliency of at-risk students. However, there is a need for research that elicits a more thorough understanding of the factors that challenge former foster youth's ability to succeed in higher education. Future researchers who want to conduct a study on this topic should note that a larger number of participants would be helpful. A varied site location (other counties and states) is also suggested. Future researchers could focus on the same topic but use quantitative methods with a large sample to obtain more data on how foster youth can be supported on varied community college campuses.

There are other considerations for future research. Since there is a limited amount of research focusing on how to respond to the needs of foster youth, additional studies could increase the understanding on the educational outcomes of the former foster youth who enroll in community colleges. There is also a need for more research that identifies the characteristics of successful programs designed to encourage foster youth to continue with their studies by transferring to a four-year university. Research is also needed on how community college campuses can work with the financial aid offices to identify students and to do a better job of helping former foster youth to financially navigate going to college.

Increasing the sample size of students being studied will help increase the understanding of what is working for foster youth on community college campuses as well as what is not working for foster youth. A related subgroup of students to study would be foster youth who are working and going to community college. Studying this group might help identify some of the challenges that influence students' ability to succeed in college while employed off campus.

## **Final Reflection**

For the last 16 years, my professional career and education have focused on issues concerning at risk youth populations' access and connections to education and employment. Even though my professional career has been grounded in youth and workforce development, I made sure that I always embedded strong connections to education. I have always held the belief that true success comes from a strong educational foundation and attainment of recognized educational credentials. As a case manager and job developer, I experienced my first introduction to interviewing and research when I discussed with the youth some of the challenges they were facing in completing school or in finding work. By working with hundreds of students and trying to connect them to resources, I recognized the need within my own organization to strengthen program design and the delivery of services. There was often a disconnection and a lack of knowledge about how to navigate the world of employment and higher education amongst the youth my organization was serving.

Another important aspect that I recognized early on was the challenge of having one person be everything to all students, while acknowledging the impact a strong relationship can have on the lives of students. I also saw the importance of advocacy and held the belief that no matter how difficult, one person could work to change policies and programs to serve all youth. I believe that people who work with youth and young adults need to have the knowledge and the resources to assist all youth in meeting their educational and career goals. But, possibly more importantly, a desire, commitment, and passion to work with students regardless of the challenges they face. Because I strongly believe that all youth can and should be supported regardless of their challenges, the need to increase the capacity of case managers and provide cross training became one of my pursuits.

My interests developed in trying to connect the most vulnerable populations back to education and employment, and I was identified by my organization to work with the Department of Child Welfare and Family Services. Immediately, I was struck by the challenges foster youth faced in accessing education, housing, and workforce experiences. As my work continued, I recognized that there was a tremendous need to collaborate, cross train, and build the capacity of our child welfare, education, youth and workforce development institutions and agencies to create better opportunities for the young people of Los Angeles and learn how to connect youth to available services and resources.

My first thoughts about cross training my colleagues began with simply trying to address a need that they were encountering out in the field. After identifying the need, I would conduct research and find best practices in the youth and workforce development field and then would collect, organize, and create materials and tools for their use with clients. Then, I would conduct workshops to teach them how to use the materials. My interest in cross training and capacity building put me in a position to coordinate the intermediary efforts for my organization and connect with larger issues concerning our delivery system. I also had the opportunity to connect with other providers such as probation, DCFS, secondary, and post-secondary institutions. Simultaneously, the Youth Council, which has policy oversight for my organization, was interested in hosting policy conferences that highlighted the challenges youth faced in meeting their educational and career goals.

Because of my interest in connecting vulnerable populations to education and workforce development, I chose to write my dissertation on one of the populations that resonated with me both personally and professionally. Understanding the experience of foster youth in higher education had long been an interest of mine, and I felt that it was important to understand the

challenges foster youth faced during their transition from care and how community colleges were responding to their needs as students. The programs are still fairly new but more are being created at different campuses across the county. In Los Angeles County, between 1,600 and 2,000 foster youth were transitioning from care each year but with passage of AB 12, which extends care to age 21, the number of youth who transition at 18 years old has been reduced. This change has created a greater incentive for Child Welfare advocates to create stronger connections to post-secondary and workforce education. Enrollment in post-secondary education is one of the ways foster youth are able to extend their time in care. I felt that it was important to provide insights into what changes can be done at the institutional level. The findings from this study can provide insight on how to strengthen local programs and highlight the importance of collaboration between the community colleges, workforce development, and child welfare agencies. This new legislation will provide foster youth much needed relief in terms of housing, but if the institutions that serve them do not address the challenges foster youth face and identify solutions, they will just be pushing the difficulty surrounding transition from the age of 18 to that age of 21. There is an opportunity to ensure that when foster youth transition from care at 21 years of age, they transition with a college education and are more prepared to be independent and successful adults.

## APPENDIX A

### RECRUITMENT LETTER – STUDENT (EMAIL TEXT)

Approved by: (Pending IRB Approval)

Dear Student,

My name is Laura Cantú, and I am a UCLA doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program (ELP). My dissertation is a case study of three Los Angeles County community colleges that are currently working with former foster youth. I am looking for students who are former foster youth to participate in my study and share their time and experience with me. My research project seeks to understand the experience of former foster youth attending community college and how the colleges are responding to their needs as students.

As a volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one 60-minute interview at any time that is convenient for you. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you may choose to stop at anytime. All information shared with me will be kept confidential. This information will be published and presented in a way that does not identify any specific person or school site. The purpose of this study is to identify recommended practices/policies for community colleges to implement.

If you would like to participate in this research project, please contact me directly and I will arrange a time and location to meet. As a thank you for volunteering your time you will be provided with at \$25 gift certificate. Thank you!

Respectfully,

Laura Canú

UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies  
Educational Leadership Program  
Doctoral Candidate  
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## APPENDIX B

### FORMER FOSTER YOUTH IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### **Introduction**

Please answer the following background information to help guide me in my research. This background information is confidential and optional. This information will be attached to your interview materials, and you will have the opportunity to review the entire information before I analyze the data. Please remember that all identifying information will be taken off of data during the analysis period and writing of the findings.

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

1. Were you in the foster care system in Los Angeles County?
2. What age did you enter the foster care system?
3. What age did you leave the foster care system?
4. Were you emancipated from care?
5. Did you have a permanent placement?
6. What type of placement(s) did you have?
7. How many placements did you have during your time in the foster care system?
8. When you emancipated from care what were your living arrangements?
9. Were you eligible for ILP services?
  - a. If yes did you access services from ILP? If yes which ones?
10. Did you graduate from high school before you transitioned from care?
11. Did you change schools while you were in foster care? If yes how many times?
12. Did you take a-g courses in high school to prepare you for college?
13. Did you apply for four-year universities? If yes, did you get accepted to any of the schools? If no, were you eligible to apply?
14. When did you enroll in the community college?
15. Is this your first campus? If not why where did you go before and why did you leave?
16. How many semesters have you completed?
17. What is your GPA?
18. Are you receiving Chaffey funds?
19. What is your current living situation?

## APPENDIX C

### FORMER FOSTER YOUTH IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### **Introduction**

First, I would like to thank you for taking the time and meeting with me today. I am a graduate student at UCLA doing research for my dissertation. My research interest is to learn about the experiences of former foster youth in community college and identify what services or supports they need to complete their educational goals. This interview should be about an hour in length. I will keep your identity confidential. Information from the interview will not be traced back to you. My goal is to capture all that you are saying as well as learn from your experience. While I will be taking notes, I would like to use a recorder to tape our conversation. This will allow us to have a natural flow to the conversation. If at any moment you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop recording the interview, you can stop the recorder here. I will transcribe the conversation and will not share the recording with anyone. Please be advised that the recordings will be stored in a secure database, and I will be the only person who has access. From time to time during this interview, you will see me writing and this is just to write down questions or clarifications that I might have at a later time. The interview will last approximately one hour. Finally, you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts and make changes.

Before we start:

Are you a former foster youth?

Are you currently attending one of the following community colleges (PCC, LACC, LAHC)?

Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

1. Please tell me about your educational background:

*Prompts:*

Did you emancipate from care with your high school diploma?

How did you find out about college and what you needed to do to attend?

When did you first enroll in community college?

Is this the first campus you have attended or have you attended others?

If you have attended others why did you leave and enroll here?

Was there a lapse in time?

How many units are you taking?

How many semesters have you enrolled at this college?

2. Please tell me about your experiences receiving support services at the college:

*Prompts:*

Are you connected to any support services on campus?

If yes, which ones?

What has been your experience receiving assistance and services at this school?

3. Tell me about your experience with the foster youth program on campus?:
 

*Prompts:*

  - How did you hear about the program?
  - When did you enroll into the foster youth program?
  - How often do you check in with staff?
  - Are you notified about services?
  - When do you contact?
  
4. Please tell me about your experience receiving support from the following services on campus:
 

*Prompts:*

  - Financial Aid:
    - Do you receive financial aid?
    - Did you have any problems qualifying or getting financial assistance?
    - Did you experience trouble trying to get financial aid to pay for school?
    - What type of financial aid do you receive?
    - Anything else you would like to discuss about financial aid?
  - Counseling:
    - Did you receive academic counseling to discuss your individual education plan? If yes, what was your experience with the services and staff?
    - Are you enrolled and receiving counseling and academic support from EOPS? What has been your experience accessing counseling?
    - How often do you meet with a counselor?
    - Has it helped you with creating your educational plan?
    - What type of counseling would you like provided to help you meet your educational goals?
    - Has a counselor helped you find resources for tutoring or other support you need to be successful in your classes? Please explain.
    - Do you have access to other forms of counseling, such as mental health services?
  
5. Please tell me about your experience interacting with staff (non foster youth program) on campus:
 

*Prompts:*

  - Do you feel that the campus staff (non program staff) are responsive to your needs?
  - What do you think they could have done or can do better to support you?
  - What role has staff had in helping you access resources, information and assistance?
  
6. Please tell me what other services do you think you need to be successful on campus?
  
7. Please tell me which services have been the most helpful and why?
  
8. In your opinion, what do foster youth need from a community college program in order to meet their educational goals?
  
9. What can your community college do to better serve foster youth?

10. What do the “successful” foster youth students have that the others do not? What do you think determines this pattern?
11. Please describe your plans for the next one to three years in terms of your educational, career and personal goals?
12. What do you think are the challenges foster youth face trying to obtain a degree from a community college?
13. Why do you think some foster youth are not enrolling or staying in community college?
14. What advice do you have for colleges that are trying to recruit and serve current and former foster youth?

## APPENDIX D

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOSTER YOUTH PROGRAM PERSONNEL – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### **Introduction**

First, I would like to thank you for taking the time and meeting with me today. I am a graduate student at UCLA doing research for my dissertation. My research interest is to learn about the experiences of former foster youth in community college and identify what services or supports they need to complete their educational goals. This interview should be about an hour in length. Please know that I will keep this conversation confidential and it will not be shared with anyone. I will use the findings for my study, but the information will not be traced back to you. My goal is to capture all that you are saying, as well as learn from your experience. While I will be taking notes, I would like to use a recorder to tape our conversation. This will allow us to have a natural flow to the conversation. If at any moment you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop recording the interview, you can stop the recorder here. I will transcribe the conversation and will not share the recording with anyone. Please be advised that the recordings will be stored in a secure database, and I will be the only person who has access. From time to time during this interview you will see me writing and this is just to write down questions or clarifications that I might have at a later time. The interview will last approximately one hour.

Before we start:

Do you work with the foster youth program?

Do you work with former foster youth?

Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

1. Please describe the design of the foster youth program on campus?

*Prompts:*

What is the name?

Who is eligible to participate in the foster youth program?

What do they need to do to become part of the program?

2. Please tell me what are the funding sources available for your program?

*Prompts:*

What are the total program costs (annual or per student)?

Did you receive a special grant to get funding for your program?

3. Please tell me how you chose to locate your program office?

*Prompts:*

How did you choose where to locate the services (e.g., Financial Aid Office vs. EOPS)?

What are the advantages and disadvantages in terms of where the program is housed and the location?

4. Please tell me how you recruit and identify the foster youth for your program?

*Prompts:*

Do you actively recruit or do outreach to foster youth?

How are foster youth identified?

Are foster youth referred to you and if so, by whom?

How did this referral system get created?

Do your outreach activities include partnering with your county child welfare agency, Independent Living Skills Program, Foster Youth Services, ILP contractors, or county mental health services?

5. What percentage of former foster youth at your school do you believe you are able to identify and/or serve?

*Prompts:*

Is there a discrepancy between the foster youth that are identified for services and foster youth actually served?

Why do you think there is a discrepancy?

What barriers do you face in serving all identified foster youth?

6. Please tell me how you identify or work with other units on campus to provide services to foster youth?

*Prompts:*

What other offices do you coordinate with on campus?

In what ways do you work with them?

7. How do you refer foster youth to other services on campus and ensure that their needs are met?

*Prompts:*

Do you have a person you refer them to directly?

Do you have a follow-up mechanism or way to track if the service was provided?

Which programs do you primarily refer youth to for services?

What kinds of services do those programs provide?

Are these services tailored to foster youth?

What kind of follow up, if any, is there?

8. Do you have partnerships or coordinate with external partners?

*Prompts:*

Do you refer foster youth to external agencies?

Which ones and why?

9. Do foster youth ask for services or resources that are not offered at the campus? If so how do you respond or handle the situation? If not how have you ensured that all the resources that foster youth need are available?

10. What is the greatest unmet need foster youth have that if met would help them be successful at this campus?

11. What service(s) do you think would help foster youth meet their educational goals?

*Prompts:*

Do you currently have these services in place?

What kinds of services would you like to provide but currently aren't able to?

12. What is your program's success rate of retaining foster youth and assisting them to transfer to four-year institutions?

*Prompts:*

Do youth track youth outcomes?

## APPENDIX E

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE SUPPORT SERVICES PERSONNEL – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### **Introduction**

First, I would like to thank you for taking the time and meeting with me today. I am a graduate student at UCLA doing research for my dissertation. My research interest is to learn about the experiences of former foster youth in community college and identify what services or supports they need to complete their educational goals. This interview should be about an hour in length. Please know that I will keep this conversation confidential and will not be shared with anyone. I will use the findings for my study but the information will not be traced back to you. My goal is to capture all that you are saying as well as learn from your experience. While I will be taking notes, I would like to use a recorder to tape our conversation. This will allow us to have a natural flow to the conversation. If at any moment you feel uncomfortable or wish to stop recording the interview, you can stop the recorder here. I will transcribe the conversation and will not share the recording with anyone. Please be advised that the recordings will be stored in a secure database and I will be the only person who has access. From time to time during this interview you will see me writing and this is just to write down questions or clarifications that I might have at a later time. The interview will last approximately one hour.

Before we start:

Do you work with former foster youth?

Do you work with one of the support services on campus?

Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

1. Please describe your relationship to the foster youth program on campus?

*Prompts:*

Do you work closely with the program personnel?

Do they contact you to refer youth or follow up on a student?

Are there any formal meetings set up between your unit and the foster youth program personnel?

2. What are the support services at your community college campus that are currently working with foster youth to address their academic and social needs?

3. Please describe any needs that are specific to foster youth (versus general EOPS or TRIO) population?

4. How do you deal with the challenges of serving this population?

5. Have you been invited to any training from the foster youth program regarding the child welfare system?

6. Are there any formalized efforts to educate administrators, instructors, and/or counselors about the needs of foster youth? If so, please describe.

7. What do you think are some of the challenges facing foster youth when they transition from care and enroll into community college?
8. What do you think gets in the way of foster youth succeeding in community colleges?
9. Are there good examples of programs or services that address the issue of retention amongst foster youth in community college? If yes, what are they?
10. What type of partnerships do you think are needed (if any), in order to help to increase community college enrollment of current and former foster youth?
11. What types of partnerships are needed (if any), in order to help to increase community college retention of current and former foster youth?
12. What is your perception of the challenges that foster youth face in enrolling and staying at a community college?
13. What do the “successful” foster youth students have that the others do not?

## APPENDIX F

### UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

##### Former Foster Youth Consent

Dissertation – A Case Study on the Community College experience of Former Foster Youth

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Laura Cantú, a Doctoral Candidate from the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a former foster youth. Your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not be disclosed to anyone nor will it adversely affect your relationship with the Community College where you are attending.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study is designed to identify the challenges faced by former foster youth who attend community college, as well as understand how community colleges are responding to the educational needs of student's needs. The results of this study can highlight best practices that can be used by other campuses working with former foster youth but also share student insight and perspectives on the needs of former foster youth in community college institutions.

#### **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following:

##### **Students:**

1. Fill out a background questionnaire
2. Be available for one 60-minute audio taped interview at any time and place that is convenient for you (e.g. your campus, or transitional resource center).

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Your participation in this study poses minimal risks. You may be asked questions about issues that may be unpopular or uncomfortable regarding educational expectations, outcomes, and ease of navigating systems.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Your participation in this study may assist community college campuses in developing policies, practices and/or a program that will most effectively support the educational needs of former foster youth on their campus. In addition, the Department of Children and Family Services will be able to revise policies and practices to better assist former foster youth interested in attending post-secondary institutions.

The results of this research may also serve to inform policy makers and national advocacy groups both locally as well as nationally.

### **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will receive a \$25 target gift card as payment for your participation in this study. Gift card will be given at the end of the interview.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of not disclosing identifiable information in the presentation of all results. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. While every attempt to ensure your confidentiality will be taken, there is a minimal risk that others may identify your comments once the study is published. You have the right to ask that some (or all) of your comments not be included in the final draft of the dissertation, and you will have the opportunity to read a draft to assure that your personal identification is not compromised.

I intend to audio record interviews. You have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part. These recordings will only be for the researcher to access and will be kept as audio files in a password protected computer. They will be destroyed two years following the completion of my dissertation.

Raw materials will have both the subject's identity and a participant number. Each participant number will be grouped in second-generation documentation by job title (student or community college staff member) and site location (Los Angeles City College, Pasadena City College and Los Angeles Harbor College). All qualitative coding and data analysis will be performed using second-generation materials. The final dissertation will present aggregate data, or if quoted, the subject will be described using a fictitious name or school site.

All hardware (recorder, laptop, and back-up hard-drive) are my personal property and are not used or accessible to any other person. In addition, when possible, data files will be password protected. A second back-up system is made by attaching documents as an email to an encrypted web-based email account with the sole function of data storage. After two years of the dissertation being filed with the UCLA Graduate Division, raw and second-generation documentation/data will be deleted and destroyed completely.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

**IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

- Laura Cantú, Doctoral Candidate, 323-620-2859
- Rick Wagoner, Co-Chair of Doctoral Committee
- Linda Rose, Co-Chair of Doctoral Committee,
- UCLA Educational Leadership Program  
1029 Moore Hall, Mailbox 951521  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-951521  
310-206-1673

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal rights because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office for Protection of Research Subjects, UCLA, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 102, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694, (310) 825-8714.

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT**

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR OR DESIGNEE**

In my judgment the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Investigator or Designee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator or Designee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX G

### UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Community College Foster Youth Program & Support Service Personnel  
Dissertation – A Case Study on the Community College experience of Former Foster Youth

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Laura Cantú, a Doctoral Candidate from the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you work with former foster youth on campus. Your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not be disclosed to anyone nor will it adversely affect your relationship with the Community College where you are working.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study is designed to identify the challenges faced by former foster youth who attend community college, as well as understand how community colleges are responding to the educational needs of students needs. The results of this study can highlight best practices that can be used by other campuses working with former foster youth but also share student insight and perspectives on the needs of former foster youth in community college institutions.

#### **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following:

##### **Community College Staff:**

1. Be available for one 60-minute audio taped interview at any time and place that is convenient for you (e.g. your classroom or office).

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Your participation in this study poses minimal risks. You may be asked questions about issues that may be unpopular or uncomfortable regarding educational expectations, outcomes, and ease of navigating systems.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Your participation in this study may assist community college campuses in developing policies, practices and/or a program that will most effectively support the educational needs of former foster youth on their campus. In addition, the Department of Children and Family Services will be able to revise policies and practices to better assist former foster youth interested in attending post secondary institutions.

The results of this research may also serve to inform policy makers and national advocacy groups both locally and nationally.

### **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will receive no payment for your participation in this study.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of not disclosing identifiable information in the presentation of all results. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. While every attempt to ensure your confidentiality will be taken, there is a minimal risk that others may identify your comments once the study is published. You have the right to ask that some (or all) of your comments not be included in the final draft of the dissertation and will have the opportunity to read a draft to assure that your personal identification is not compromised.

I intend to audio record interviews. You have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part. These recordings will only be for the researcher to access and will be kept as audio files in a password protected computer. They will be destroyed two years following the completion of my dissertation.

Raw materials will have both the subject's identity and a participant number. Each participant number will be grouped in second-generation documentation by job title (student or community college staff member) and site location (Los Angeles City College, Pasadena City College, and Los Angeles Harbor College). All qualitative coding and data analysis will be performed using second-generation materials. The final dissertation will present aggregate data, or if quoted, the subject will be described using a fictitious name or school site.

All hardware (recorder, laptop, and back-up hard-drive) are my personal property and are not used by or accessible to any other person. In addition, when possible, data files will be password protected. A second back-up system is made by attaching documents as an email to an encrypted web-based email account with the sole function of data storage. After two years of the dissertation being filed with the UCLA Graduate Division, raw and second-generation documentation/data will be deleted and destroyed completely.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

**IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

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 1029 Moore Hall, Mailbox 951521  
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**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal rights because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office for Protection of Research Subjects, UCLA, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 102, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694, (310) 825-8714.

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT**

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR OR DESIGNEE**

In my judgment the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Investigator or Designee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator or Designee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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