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**Students in Foster Care: Considerations for Access and Retention**

Robert D. Mack, Ed.D., Curry College

Emerson and Lovitt (2003) argue that foster youth in transition are, in large part, without health insurance, and are homeless. They noted that 61 percent left foster care with no job experience or work related skills. Those who left foster care entered postsecondary education at a rate of 10 percent, compared to their peers who were not in care, which entered at a rate of 60 percent. The ability for foster youth to be successful in school has been researched, and the studies most often discovered similar factors that contribute to poor or low success rates and low student achievement, such as multiple placement transition (homes and schools), truancy, lack of academic and emotional support, and systematic barriers.

The on-going concern for these youth remains with the many difficulties and challenges related to gaining college access. Many variables systematically work against youth in care. According to Krebs and Pitcoff (2006): "Children in foster care are the most educationally at-risk population" (p. 34). These variables consist of low ex-

pectations, multiple home placements, lack of instructional support and financial support, poor public policy, and commonly being misplaced in academic programs during secondary education. Foster youth more often than not are placed in special education or vocational programs, are less likely to be placed in college-preparatory programs, are placed in alternative schools, or receive education through residential or group home programs. All of these misplacements end up resulting in:

- \*Decreased independent skills
- \*Decreased study skills
- \*Decreased support systems
- \*Lack of continuity in living and lack of ability to support self
- \*Decreased financial stability and increased financial hardship
- \*Increased mental health issues

Depending on state regulations, aging out of the foster care system will generally hap-

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“Helping these students be cognizant of where they feel most supported, and acknowledging the areas that will require building support systems can help students avoid anxiety, isolation, and retreating.”



generally happen at age 18, though for some youth it may occur between ages 18 and 22. Research has clearly shown that all of these youth face a shared and frightening experience, since their systemic care has not prepared them properly for the transition to independence, nor has it provided the skill preparation necessary for those who are interested in pursuing postsecondary education (Yeager, Viennal, Henderson, Hutson, & Gomez, 2001). While the foster care system can demonstrate that postsecondary educational resources are available to foster youth, these resources are limited, can at times be inadequate, and do not always have a direct link to the youth, thereby limiting access to postsecondary education. Access involves awareness, preparation, and financial support which include financial literacy, money management skills, and mentoring.

Emerson and Lovitt (2003) found that foster youth were at a disadvantage, as they had reduced access to programs, advanced placement courses, and extracurricular clubs and sports. These all play an essential role in the development process, but also support the college application process. Martin and Jackson (2002) found that over three-quarters of youth who leave foster care between the ages of 16 and 18 have no life skills. This is compared to the general population rate of one in ten.

Only a small percentage of these youth matriculate into college. The following are recommendations that intuitions of higher education can take to increase access:

- >Admissions can use non-cognitive factors to assist with acceptance decisions
- >Bring foster care alumnae on campus; specifically with bridge programs, first year experience programs, and other campus programming geared to diversity and retention
- >Financial Aid Offices can support students with aid packages that consider the difference between zero expected family contribution and those who are independent.
- >Institutional Research can track data and make recommendations to better support this population
- >Apply for grant programs, such as TRIO, that provide resources and support to first generation college students, and students who were in foster care.

While accessing higher education has been clearly documented as a challenge for youth in the foster care system, those who have matriculated face additional challenges after enrollment. Studies have found that between 3-5% of foster youth alumnae will graduate from college. Institutions that accept youth from foster care can take several measures to increase their retention and graduation rates including:

- >Have staff/faculty who are knowledgeable about systematic care
- >Have staff/faculty who will advocate when needed
- >Help students to identify their support systems early in the transition process
- >Assist foster youth with referrals, and attend the first meeting with them when appropriate

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## President's Column

Regina McCarthy, LAANE President

Assistant Dean—Academics UNH Manchester

The 2011/2012 academic year is about to close. In this column I want to look back at LAANE accomplishments over this past academic year and ask you to start thinking about the 2012/2013 year ahead and ways you might support LAANE.

You may not be aware of the behind-the-scenes work that goes on with the LAANE Executive Board. Let me bullet the 2011/2012 accomplishments for you.

- LAANE contracted with a new web host company to upgrade the image of LAANE <http://www.laanechapter.org/> and to improve the efficiency of chapter operations and member services including:

- >Members now are able to register and pay online for our annual conference.

- >Membership is tied to annual conference registration or to a regional workshop registration.

- >If members are unable to attend either event noted above, they have the option of becoming a member of LAANE by joining and paying for “membership only” online.

- >Members are able to stay in contact with us by joining our mailing list.

- >We’ve compiled a list with URLs for other professional organizations to which LAANE members also belong.

- We have tried to “go greener” by allowing members to conduct more chapter business online.

- We purchased a subscription to Constant Contact to be able to communicate more regularly with chapter membership. (Please make sure we don’t go into your SPAM folder!)

- We awarded a scholarship to a deserving student who benefited from developmental education.
- We created a new Executive Board position, Emeritus Member of the Executive Board, to keep important and passionate people involved with our organization; to move board members from the active board to a place where they can make valuable contributions and continue to be valued by the organization; to keep distinguished scholars and practitioners on our “stationery”, in our annual reports, and in publicity material; and to assure continuity of service to LAANE for consistency in policy and practice.
- We created a LAANE Professional Development Grant Award (competitive) to foster professional growth of our members and contribute to the field of developmental education. The grant will be awarded to assist in research, leadership, curricular innovation, and educational advancement. The grant funds proposals up to \$750.00. An individual may be awarded only one professional development grant every two calendar years. Check out our website for more information.
- We forged closer ties with NADE, our parent organization, by hosting past president of NADE Jane Neuberger as our keynote speaker at the LAANE conference in October 2011 and by revising our mission statement to better reflect our relationship with NADE. “Our mission is to promote the acceptance, advancement, and improvement of post-secondary developmental education through research and practice. As a regional



*Our mission is to promote the acceptance, advancement, and improvement of post-secondary developmental education through research and practice. As a regional affiliate of NADE, we are dedicated to helping under-prepared students prepare, prepared students advance and advanced students excel.”*

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- >Build relationships with key resources on campus such as Financial Aid, Counseling Services, and Tutoring. Additionally, learn about external resources such as child care and transportation services.
- >Assist foster youth with developing nonacademic goals providing holistic support
- >Encourage students to take first year seminar to assist with the transition
- >Help students connect with other peers who can serve as a mentor

Higher education professionals have to consider that the state care system provides youth with survival training, rather than supporting youth on educational initiatives that may provide the necessary tools for them to become independent. Foster youth are raised in a case management system. This system determines all the actions, needs, supports, and goals for foster youth. The process encourages a passive approach to making life decisions, and taking responsibilities for their needs.

When foster youth enter college they are asked to be actively engaged in their learning process, and in managing their lives. This is a complicated transition. Advisors and other personnel can help change this dynamic by asking students to identify the support systems they have in place, both internally at the institution, and externally in the multiple areas in which impact their daily lives. These areas include academics, daily living needs, social connections, community involvement, work responsibility, health, and spirituality. Helping these students be cognizant of where they feel most supported, and acknowledging the areas that will require building support systems can help students avoid anxiety, isolation, and retreating. Supportive staff can help build a larger network that will help encourage and empower students.

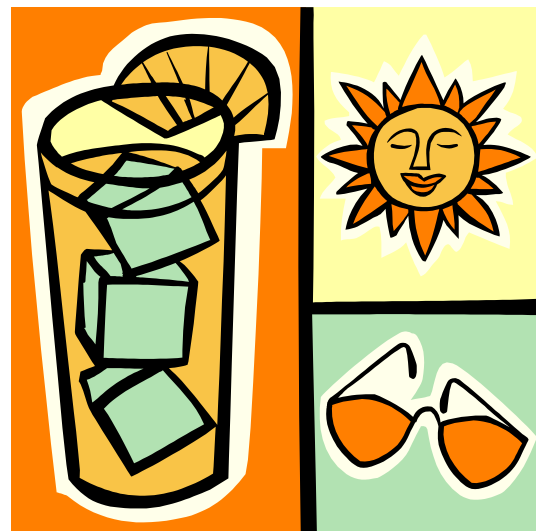
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*affiliate of NADE, we are dedicated to helping under-prepared students prepare, prepared students advance and advanced students excel."*

- We are actively recruiting vendor participation for our 2012 conference based on your conference feedback.
- We are trying to line up more regional workshops in different locations to meet your professional interests and geographical recommendations.
- In May 2011 we hosted a regional workshop at Bryant College on Integrating Advising, Teaching, and Learning: A Formula for Success and Retention presented by Laurie Hazard, Bryant University, with two breakout sessions: *Making Connections: How One Writing Center Plays an Integral Role in Retention* and *Time Management, Motivation, and Procrastination: Understanding and Teaching Self-Regulatory Behaviors*.
- We hosted a Regional workshop at Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts on May 22, 2012, *Helping Students Understand the Aims and Methods of Online Courses*. <http://www.laanechapter.org/events/regional-workshop-2> Undergraduate students often misunderstand what their instructors want from them, especially when there is a disconnect between the instructor's aims and methods, a situation which often occurs with online courses. Dakin Burdick (Director, Center for Teaching Excellence, Endicott College, <http://dakinburdick.wordpress.com/about/>) lead participants in a brief discussion of the various learning theories (behaviorist, cognitive, social cognitive, constructivist, and connectionist) and some of the ways they have informed the instructional design models used by faculty members. Participants explored the ways that students can identify faculty aims through different forms of evidence (syllabus, assignments, course content (inc. textbooks), etc.). Dr. Burdick then discussed how online course tools (LMSs, blogs, wikis, Twitter, etc.) lend themselves to specific instructional aims, after which participants identified some of the ways that students of all learning styles can fulfill faculty expectations when faced with an online course design that may not accurately represent those aims.

- We are responding to your geographical needs by hosting our 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference at Greenfield Community College in Greenfield, Massachusetts (Friday, October 26, 2012). The Conference title is "Student Success: There's an App for That!" Visit our website for more information.

Those are just a few of the academic year highlights for LAANE. We'd like you to think about the following to help grow our organization and our members:

- >Submit an award nomination now for 2012. As you do end-of-year evaluations or annual reports, you might have a colleague in mind that has done exceptional work on your campus to support and advance students or developmental education. Visit our website for all award categories and nomination information.
- >Consider hosting the LAANE annual conference in fall 2013 at your college/university.
- >Volunteer to host a regional workshop at your college or university in spring 2013 or after. Contact Erica Hochberg, Regional Workshop Coordinator, at [ehochber@endicott.edu](mailto:ehochber@endicott.edu)
- >Share with us the URLs of the websites you visit most often to support your work. (Complete the contact us mail form on the LAANE home page.)
- >Increase our membership by suggesting a colleague join LAANE.
- >Send us your ideas for exciting keynote speakers. Give us your ideas for conference themes. Help us identify workshop presenters who have inspired you. Our organization is as rich and robust as our members' contributions.

Have a wonderful summer and I look forward to seeing you all at our fall conference.







29th Annual Conference – Friday, October 26, 2012

Greenfield Community College,

Greenfield, MA

## **“Student Success: There’s an App for That!”**

**Keynote Speaker: Dr. Brenda Mathis**

**Lesley University, Cambridge, MA**

The Proposal form must be completed by the Contact Presenter who will be responsible for keeping co-presenters informed about the status of the proposal. The Contact Presenter must supply both institutional and summer addresses. This person must also inform the Program Chair of any address changes or other variances related to the proposal. An acknowledgement that the Program Chair received your proposal will be sent to you via e-mail.

### **Suggested Topics of Interest to LAANE Members:**

- |                       |                         |                           |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| * Academic            | * First Year Experience | * Reading Proficiency     |
| * Advising/Counseling | * Learning Centers      | * Retention               |
| * Administrative      | * Learning Disabilities | * Service Learning        |
| Dilemmas              | * Literacy/Writing      | * Technology              |
| * Assessment          | * Mathematics &         | * Transferring from 2 yr. |
| * Career Development  | Science                 | to 4 yr institutions      |
| * Cognition/Learning  | * Online Learning       | * Transition to Higher    |
| Theory                | * Peer Mentoring        | Education                 |
| * Diversity           | * Peer Tutoring         | * Tutor Training          |
| * English Language    | * Professional          | * Your hot topic?         |
| Learners              | Development             |                           |

**Complete Proposal Form can be found at the LAANE website:**

**<http://www.laanechapter.org/events/conference-2012/call-for-proposals>**

**All Proposal materials should be mailed or emailed to:**

Norman Beebe, Chairperson, Proposal Committee  
Greenfield Community College  
One College Drive  
Greenfield, MA 01301  
Beebe@gcc.mass.edu

**New Proposal Deadline: July 20, 2012**

**If you have not received an acknowledgement of receipt of your proposal within a week, please call**

**Norman at 413-775-1333**

**All presenters must register and pay for the Conference.**

**Visit LAANE's new web site at:**  
**[www.LAANEchapter.org](http://www.LAANEchapter.org)**



## LAANE Scholarship

At the annual Fall Conference (2012), LAANE will offer a \$500 student scholarship. The Scholarship will be awarded to a student who at the time of application:

- is enrolled in a bachelor's or associate's degree program
- has completed at least 6 credits of developmental coursework
- has earned at least 24 credits
- has a cumulative GPA of at least 3.2
- will be a *continuing* student (graduating students are ineligible to apply)

The student must provide:

- an official transcript
- an essay addressing one of several writing prompts related to the role of developmental education
- a letter of recommendation from a faculty member, professional staff member or administrator.

Encourage your students to apply!

Complete application information will be placed on the LAANE web site in late summer.



## Upcoming Professional Conferences

Professional conferences, workshops, symposiums, and in-service meetings are of considerable importance to our development as teachers, administrators, professors -- to all professionals. They introduce us to ideas and revive our interests in our career. We network, share experiences, gain insight, and often return to our respective institutions more enlightened and feeling less alone in our work. If you know of a conference you would like to see your colleagues attend, please send that information to Susan Lemire, LAANE Editor, at 978-934-2948 or at [Susan\\_Lemire@uml.edu](mailto:Susan_Lemire@uml.edu) or UMass Lowell, 61 Wilder St., Lowell, MA 01854

### National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)

#### Annual Conference

The National ACademic ADvising Association is holding its 36th Annual Conference, Nashville, TN, Oct. 4-7, 2012. The theme of the conference is "Empowering Students to Write Their Own Songs of Success." For more information, visit the NACADA website at [www.nacada.ksu.edu/AnnualConf/2012/index.htm](http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/AnnualConf/2012/index.htm).

### CRLA National Conference

**Nov. 7 –10, 2012**

The 45th Annual CRLA Conference will be held in Houston, TX. The

theme is "Exploring New Angles on Student Learning and Diversity." For more information, visit the Conference website at <http://www.crla.net/conference/>

### National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

#### Annual Conference

The NCTE Annual Convention will be held November 15-18, 2012 in Las Vegas, NV. The theme of the Conference is "Dream—Connect—Ignite." For more information, visit the NCTE website at [www.ncte.org/annual](http://www.ncte.org/annual).

### NADE Conference

**Feb. 27—March 2, 2013**

The Conference will be held in Denver, CO. The theme of the Conference is "Pioneering the Educational Frontier." For more information, visit the website at <http://www.nade.net/conference.html>



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