

The Center for Fostering Success

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Webinar Series

**Discovery Driven Solutions Related
to Educational Attainment for
Students from Foster Care**



An Analysis of Foster Care Placement History and Post-Secondary Graduation Rates



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Statement of Problem

- ❖ More than 26,000 youth aged out of foster care in 2011
- ❖ In 2000, the percentage of exits due to aging out was 7 percent. In 2011, 11 percent of the children who exited foster care aged out.
- ❖ Only 50% of foster care youth graduate from high school within 5 years.
- ❖ These youth are at high risk for unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, and dependence on public assistance ---in part, because of their low level of educational attainment



Review of Research on Postsecondary Educational Attainment

	Foster Care	Non-Foster Care
19 year olds pursuing a 4 year degree	18%	62%
25 year olds with a bachelor's degree	3%	24%
College students who have earned a degree within 6 years	26%	58%

25-34 year olds who had a least a bachelor's degree earned, on average, 61% more than those with only a high school diploma or GED



Review of Research on Postsecondary Educational Attainment cont.

- ❖ Less likely academically prepared for college
- ❖ Over-represented at low performing high schools
- ❖ Less likely to take college preparatory courses in high school
- ❖ More likely to enroll in remedial courses in college in first year
- ❖ Remedial education delays degree attainment
- ❖ Only 52% students take remedial education courses finish in 8 years compared to 78% non-remedial peers



Significance of the Research

- ❖ Gap in higher education achievement between former foster youth and their non-foster care peers
- ❖ Student service personnel at many post-secondary institutions are not prepared to address the unique needs of this population
- ❖ Inherent conflicts between societal values and child welfare policy and practice with respect to foster youth who have reached the age of majority



Research Questions

- ❖ Do college students who had been in foster care graduate at the same rate as low-income, first generation college students?
- ❖ Does any difference in graduation rates between foster care and other low-income, first generation college students vary by academic standing?



Definition of Terms

- ❖ Low income - An individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount.
- ❖ First Generation- Students who's parents had not completed any degree beyond a high school diploma
- ❖ GPA – time varying covariate; dichotomous variable (Pass- 2.0 and greater / Fail – 1.99 or less)



Study Design

- ❖ Longitudinal cohort study using data from the MSU Student Information Systems Database
- ❖ Sample
 - ❖ Target Group: 444 foster care alumni enrolled as MSU undergraduates between 2000 and 2009
 - ❖ Comparison Group: stratified random sample of 378 non-foster care MSU undergraduates



Variables of Interest

❖ Person-period Data Set – each person has multiple records-one for each measurement occasion

❖ Independent Variables

- Group Status (time invariant covariate)

- gender and race also included

- GPA (time varying covariate)

❖ Censoring

❖ Dependent Variable (binary)

- Enrollment status at end of observation period

- Number of semesters from 1st MSU enrollment to graduation (maximum = 21)



Analysis- Discrete Time Hazard Model

- ❖ Hazard function: Probability that an event will occur at time (t) given that it has not already occurred.
- ❖ Person-period data set: Sample participants have multiple records- one for each semester
- ❖ Censoring:
 - ❖ Missing data problem common in survival analysis
 - ❖ Cases that do not experience the event of interest (i.e., graduation) prior to the end of the observation period
 - Students who drop out
 - Students who are still enrolled



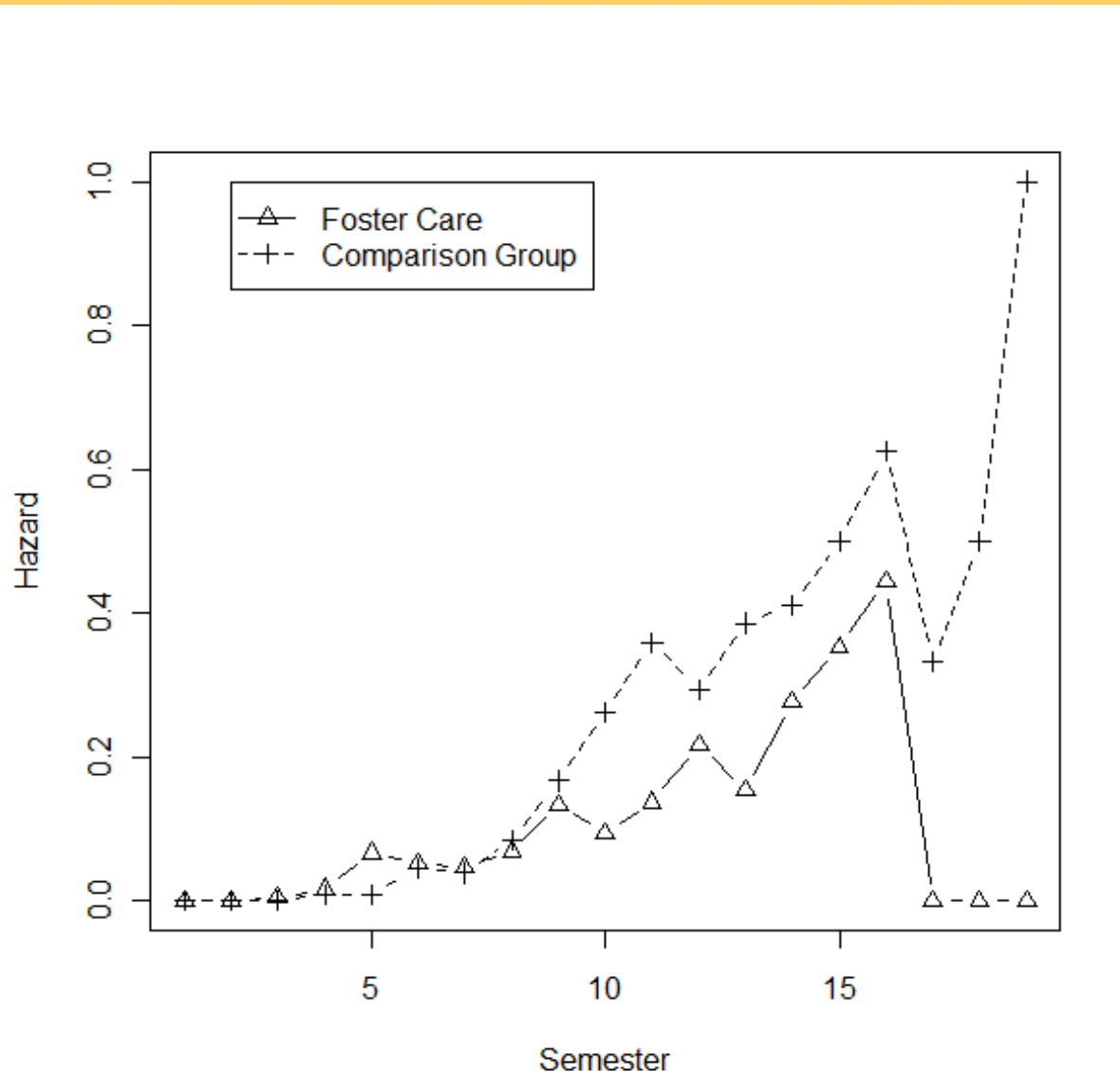
Results

Enrollment Status of Students at the End of the Observation Period

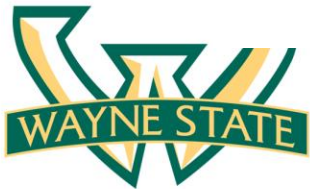
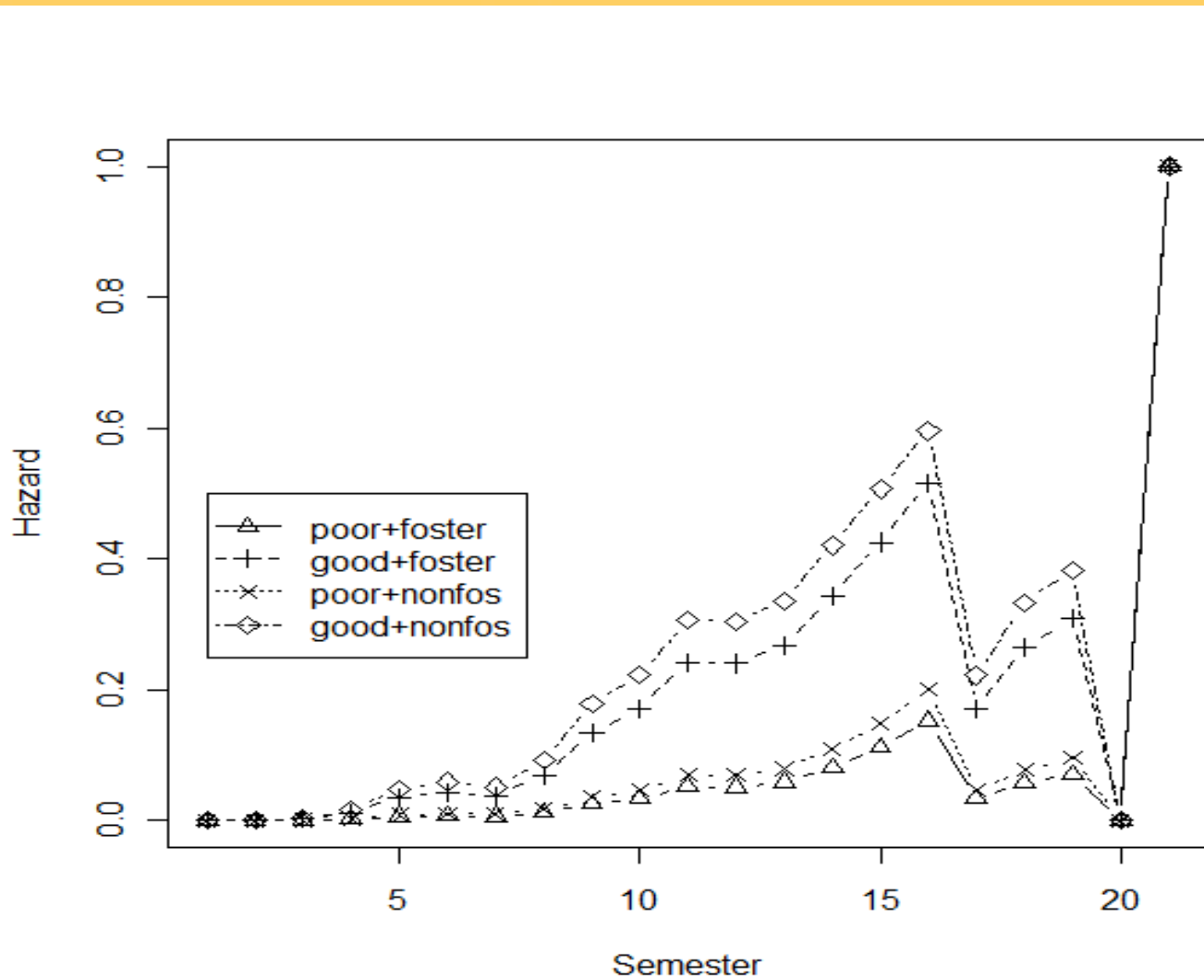
	Graduated	Dropped Out	Still Enrolled
Ward of the court status			
Non-foster Care	74%	18%	7%
Foster Care	40%	33%	27%
Gender			
Male	53%	28%	20%
Female	57%	26%	17%
Race			
White	64%	21%	15%
African American	44%	34%	22%
Other*	60%	22%	18%
Academic standing at end of last semester enrolled			
Passing GPA	64%	17%	19%
Failing GPA	6%	79%	14%



Semester Specific Effects of Foster Care Status on Graduation



Effects of Foster Care Status and Academic Standing on Graduation



Results Summary

- ❖ Non-foster care students graduated at a higher rate than foster care alumni
- ❖ Effect was statistically significant during semesters 5, 10, 11, and 13
- ❖ Gender was not related to the rate of graduation
- ❖ Race had a significant effect on the rate of graduation
- ❖ Students in poor academic standing graduated at a lower rate than students in good academic standing
- ❖ Foster care students in good academic standing graduated at lower rates than their counterparts in good academic standing



Policy and Practice Implications

- ❖ Foster care students in good academic standing are still at-risk of dropping out
- ❖ Foster care students' needs may differ from those of their non-foster peers (i.e. informal support)
- ❖ Need campus support programs that specifically target foster care youth to increase their retention and graduation rates
- ❖ These supports need to be offered from the time of enrollment to the time of degree completion
- ❖ Federal and state higher education budgets should include appropriations to support sustainability and expansion of these



targeted programs

Limitations

Data set was limited

Analysis could not control for:

- ❖ Age at which alumni exited foster care
- ❖ Years between foster care exit and first enrollment in college
- ❖ Foster care placement history
- ❖ Could not identify transfer students
- ❖ Could not control for prior academic performance or test scores on college entrance exams
- ❖ Could not examine effect of eligibility for the Education Training Voucher (ETV)



Questions?



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If you have a research study that you are interested in presenting via this series, please contact Dr. Yvonne Unrau, Director of the Center for Fostering Success at Yvonne.Unrau@wmich.edu with your ideas.



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