



*Strategies for Supporting Young People Transitioning
out of Foster Care Webinar Series*

College Success: Evaluating the Seita Scholars Program

#LiveAtUrban

Housekeeping

- Event is being recorded and the recording will be posted online afterward.
- The slides are available online.
- All participants are muted.
- Type your **questions** or **comments** into the Q&A box at any time.





Planning a Next-Generation Evaluation Agenda for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood

The Urban Institute and its partner Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago have been contracted by the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to help develop an evaluation agenda to learn more about the effectiveness of programs for young people in foster care.



This project is supported by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (Contract #HHSP23320095654WC). The contents of this presentation do not necessarily represent the official views or policies of OPRE, ACF, or HHS.

Introduction and Welcome

- Strategies for Supporting Young People Transitioning Out of Foster Care



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Agenda

1. Background on education and young people in foster care
2. About the Seita Scholars program
3. Formative evaluation results
4. Lessons for the field
5. Discussion



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Background on Education and Young People in Foster Care

- Postsecondary education is increasingly essential to economic stability and associated with other positive outcomes.
- The majority of young people in foster care have college aspirations.
- Compared with their peers, young people in foster care are
 - less likely to enroll in college;
 - less likely to graduate if they enroll.

Barriers to College Success

- Lack of preparation for postsecondary education
- Lack of financial support
- Lack of exposure to college culture
- Housing instability
- Colleges unfamiliar with or not prepared to address the unique needs of young people in care
- Students not knowing how or where to get the help they need

Strategies to Increase College Success

- State tuition waiver programs
- Targeted college scholarships
- Federal Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program
- College success programs



Address
financial
need

College Success Programs

- Provide wraparound services and supports to help students with foster care experience succeed in school and graduate
- Typically address financial, academic, housing, and/or social and emotional needs
- Most are affiliated with a single school, but some operate statewide
- Some are state funded, but many rely at least partly on foundations and/or donors
- Programs vary with respect to selectivity and eligibility

Motivation for Current Project

- Little progress in building the evidence base for programs that improve the postsecondary educational outcomes of young people in foster care
- No postsecondary educational programs for this population have been rigorously evaluated
- Goal is to learn more about the implementation of college success programs and assess their potential for rigorous evaluation

Identifying College Success Programs

- Interviewed representatives from 18 college success programs
- Gathered information about the students they serve, the services and supports they provide, and the sustainability of their funding
- Selected the Seita Scholars program at Western Michigan University (WMU) as the focus of our formative evaluation activities

Seita Scholars Program

Seita Scholars Program Development

- Phase 1 (2007–12): Build a data-driven service delivery model of campus-based support for college students from foster care.
 - Student Voice and Expertise about Lived Experience
- Phase 2 (2013–15): Package lessons learned in a training model designed for child welfare and education professionals.
- Phase 3 (2016–present): Invite research opportunities to investigate impact and build more robust service and training solutions.

Seita Scholars Program Elements

- Coaching Model:
 - Professional, dedicated staff; 24-hour support
 - Three step model
- Community Building & Belonging:
 - Outreach—early
 - Peer mentors
 - Summer early transition week
 - First year seminar course
 - Identity groups
 - Activities and year-round housing
- Scholarship:
 - Cost of attendance
 - Endowments
 - Emergency fund

Formative Evaluation Results

Formative Evaluation Questions

- Does the program have a coherent logic model?
- Is the program being implemented with fidelity to its logic model?
- Does the program have data to measure the services it provides and their intended outcomes?
- Is it likely that an evaluation would be able to detect impacts?

Formative Evaluation Activities

- Site visits (2017 and 2018)
 - Interviews with key informants from the program, WMU, and child welfare agency
 - Focus groups and individual interviews with students
- Analysis of program and administrative data
 - Student interactions with coaches
 - Academic outcomes

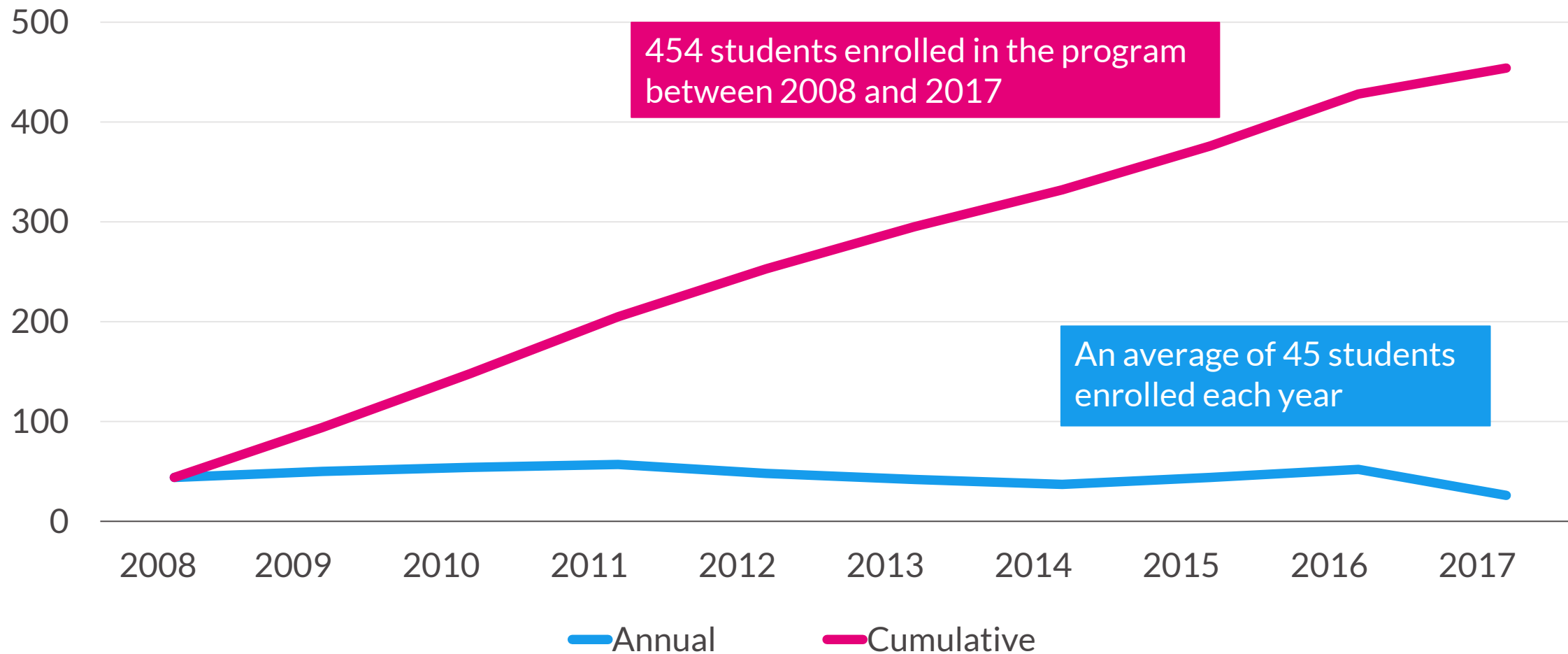
Results from Site Visits

- Seita Scholars spoke highly of their relationships with coaches, felt they could talk openly with their coaches, and credited their coaches for much of their success at WMU.
- Seita Scholars acknowledged not being able to afford a school like WMU without the scholarship.
- WMU faculty, staff, and administration made it clear that the Seita Scholars program enjoys a significant amount of institutional support.

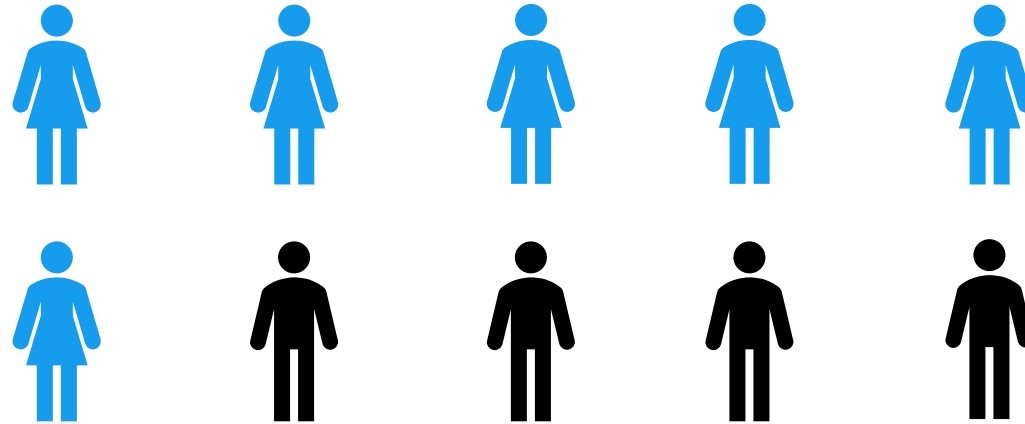
Results from Site Visits

- Sometimes other students assume that Seita Scholars are only admitted to WMU because they were in foster care or question why other groups of “disadvantaged” students are not eligible.
- Some Seita Scholars were critical of the “on-campus housing” requirement because it isolates them from their peers who are free to live off campus.

Number of Seita Scholars

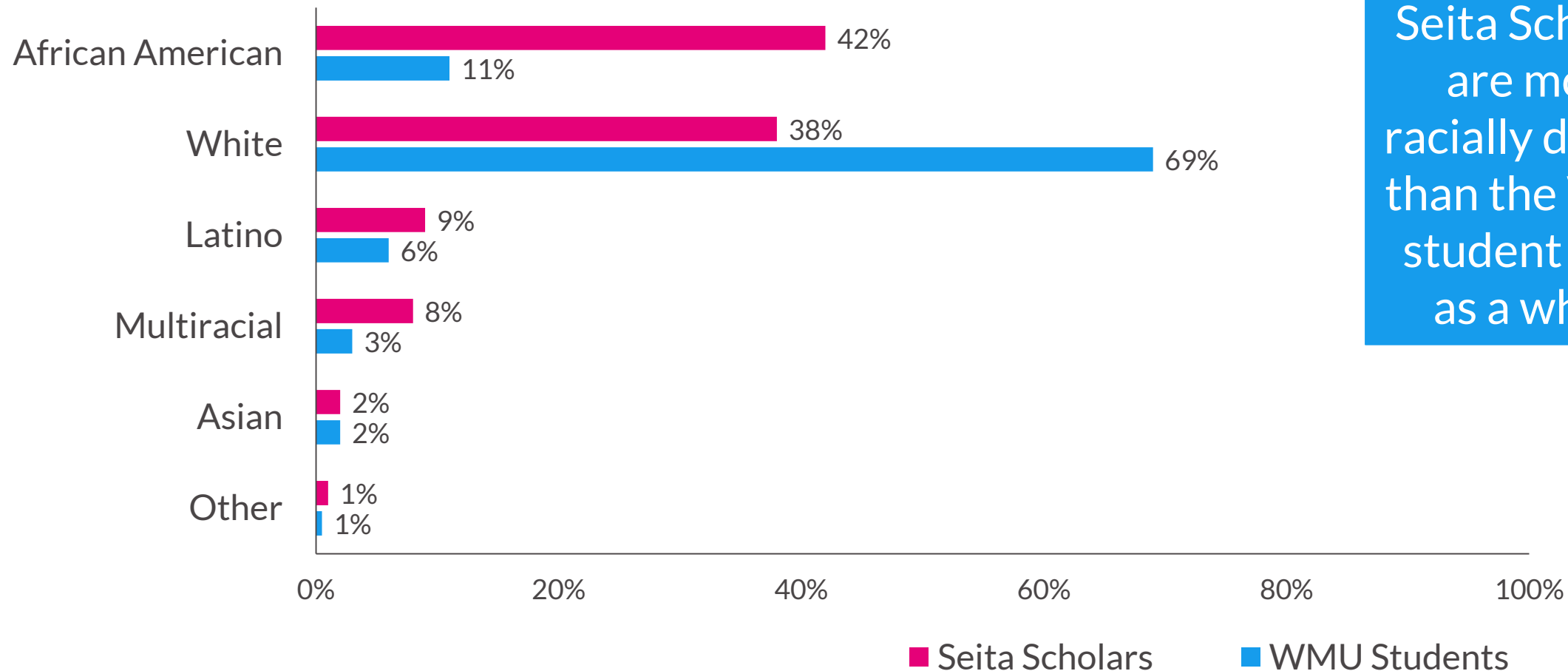


Gender of Seita Scholars



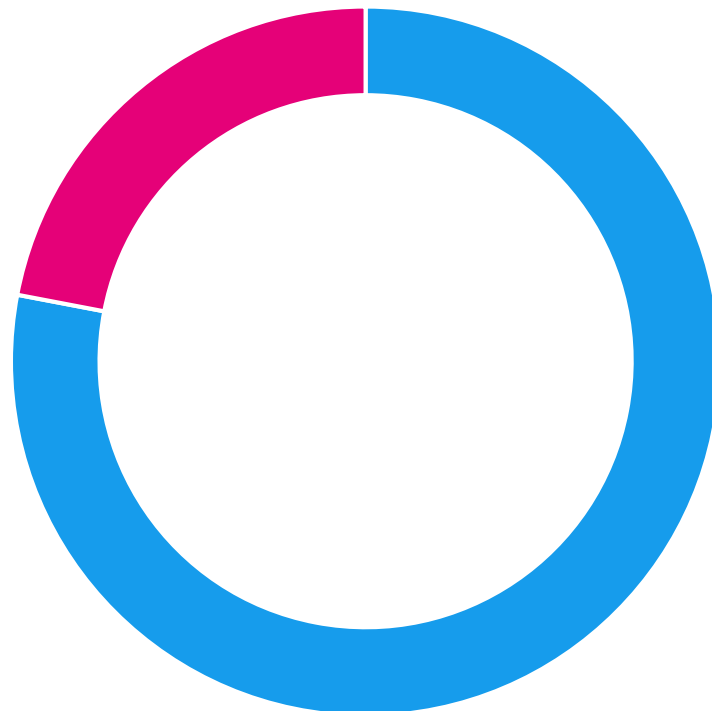
6 out of 10 students are female.

Race of Seita Scholars Compared to WMU Students



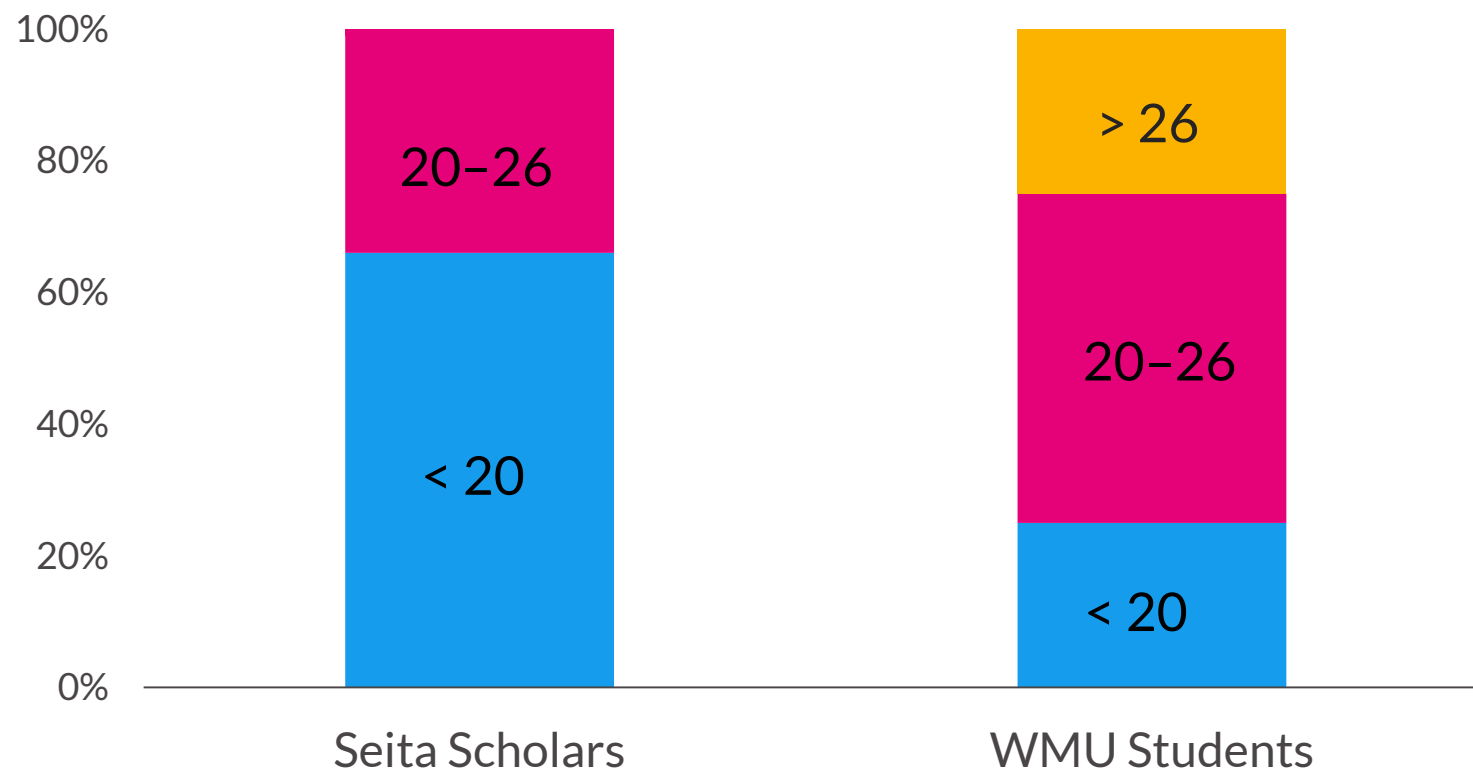
Seita Scholars
are more
racially diverse
than the WMU
student body
as a whole

Status of Seita Scholars at Enrollment



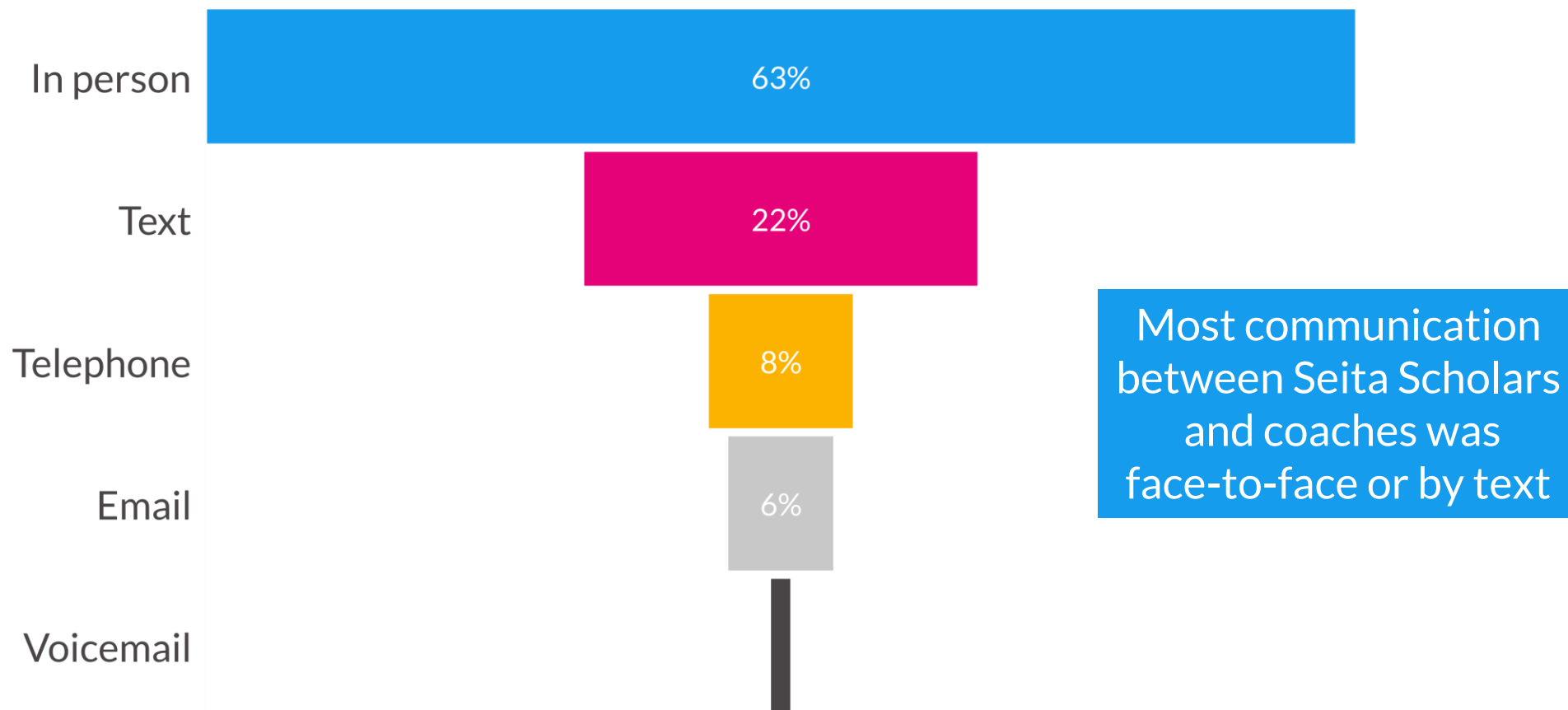
78% of Seita Scholars enroll as first-year students

ACT Scores: Seita Scholars versus All WMU Students

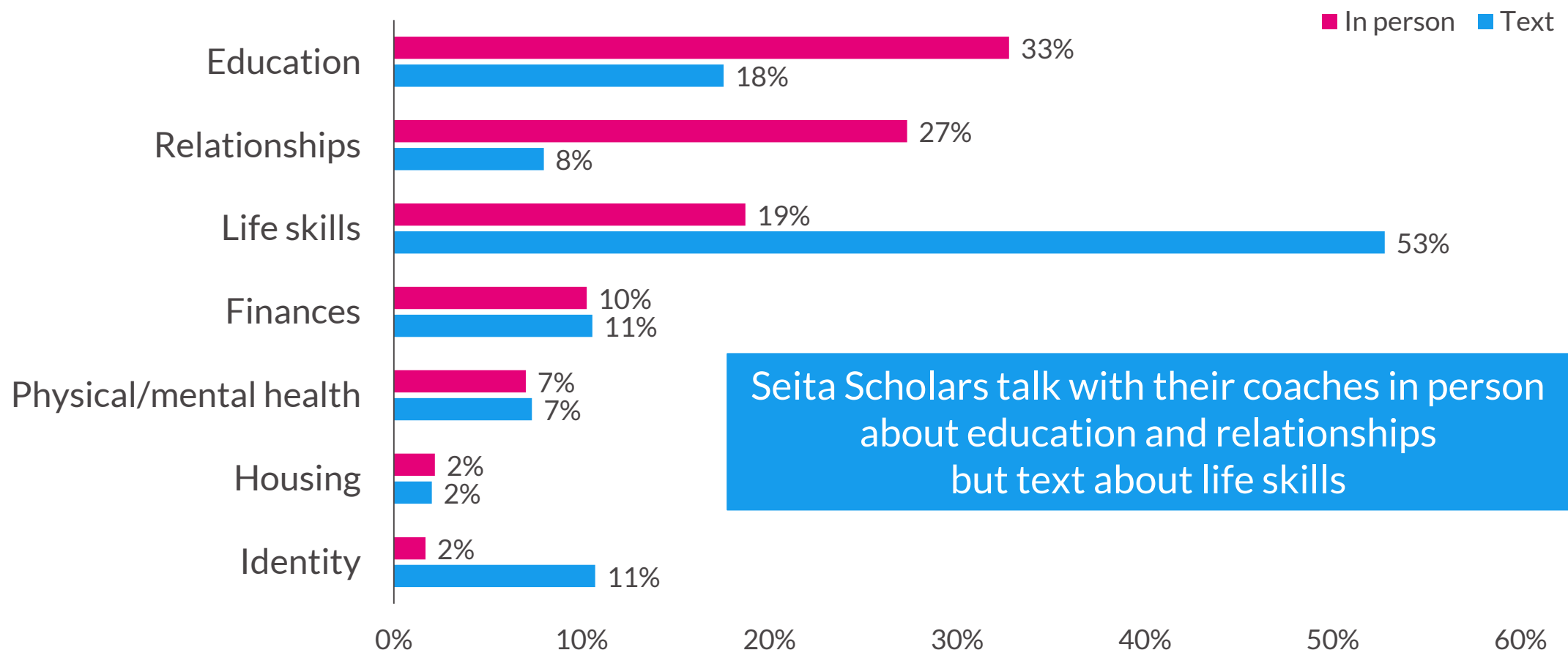


Seita Scholars have lower average ACT scores than other WMU students

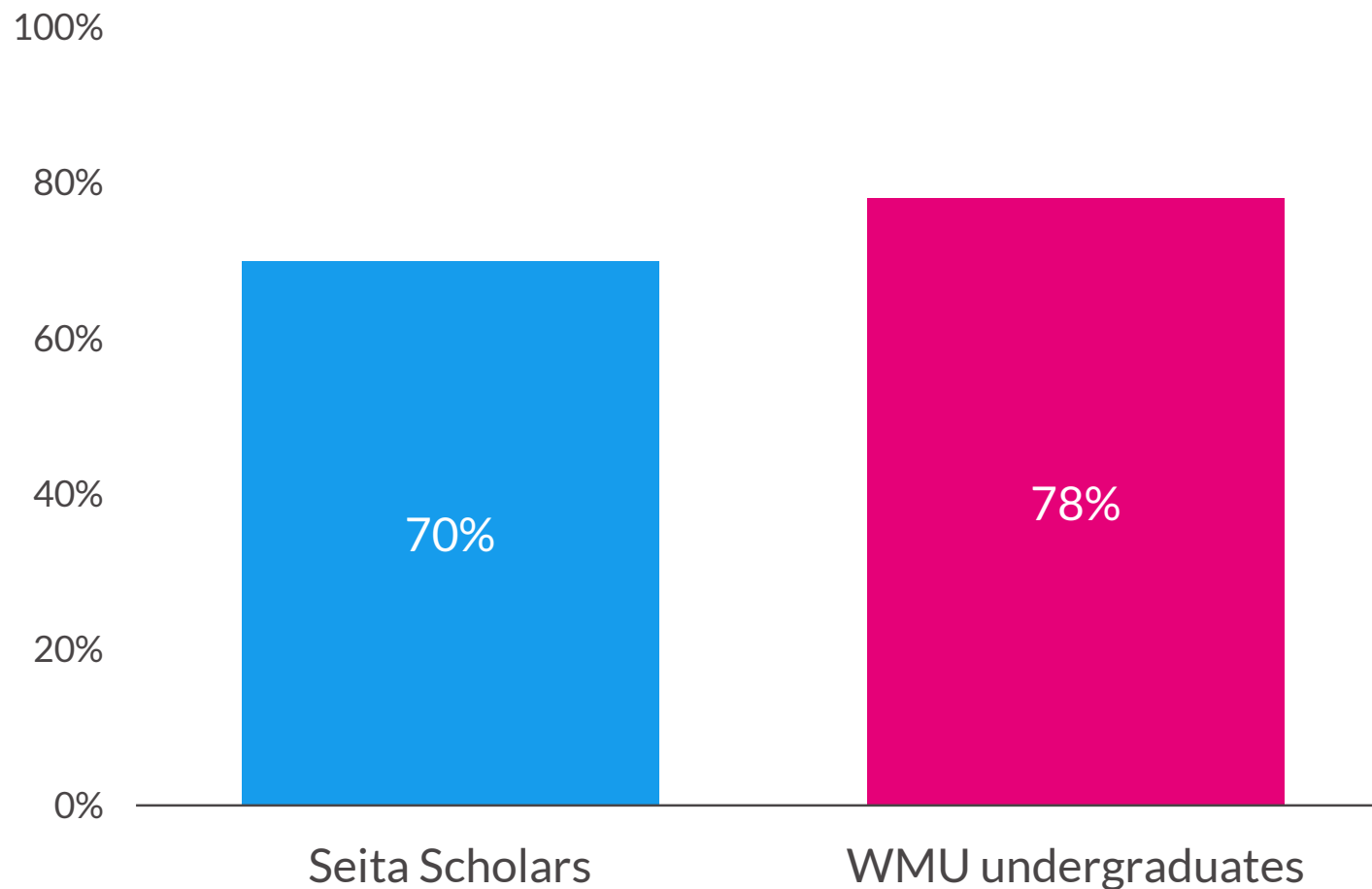
Types of Communication between Seita Scholars and Coaches



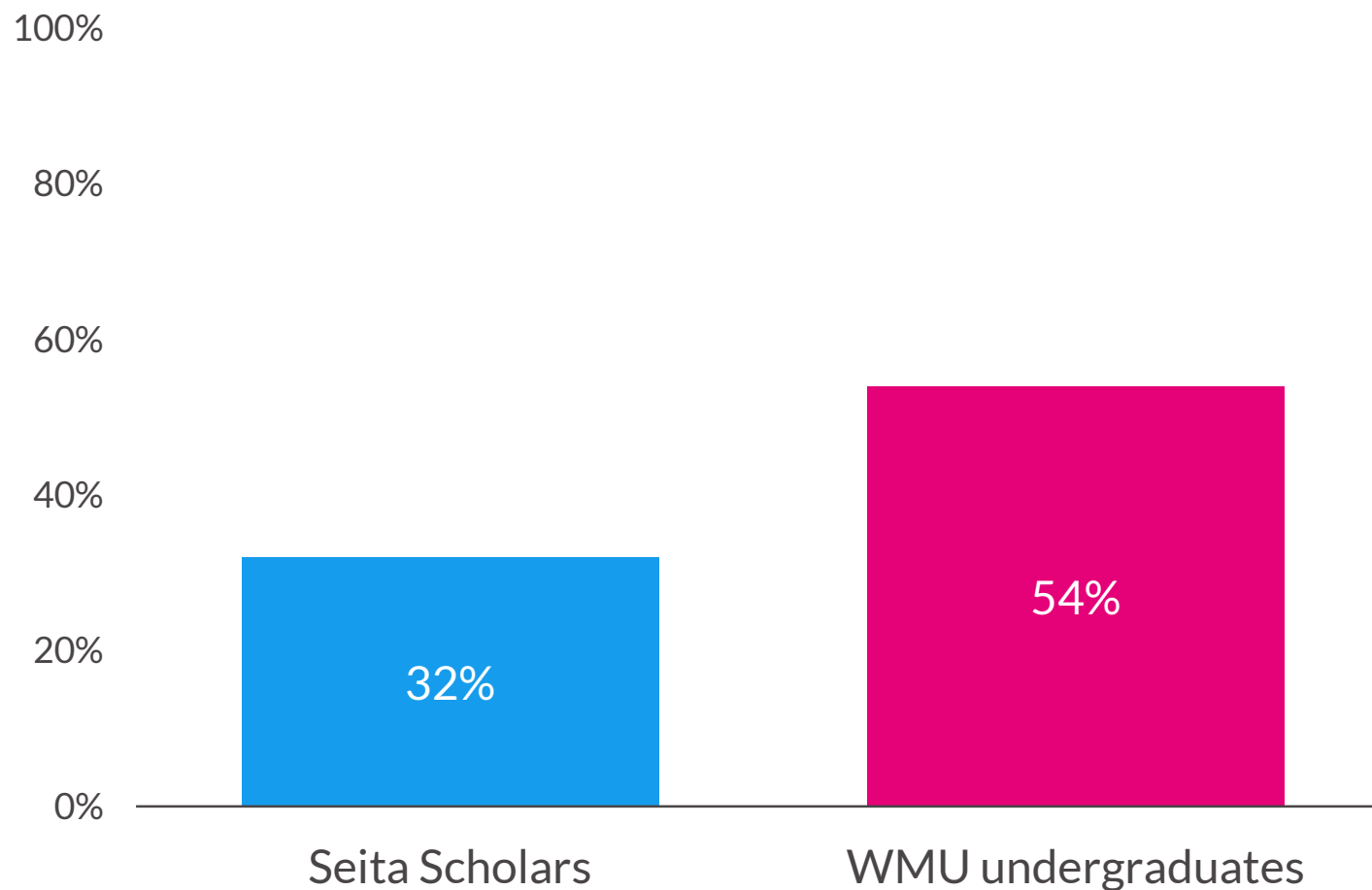
Focus of In-Person and Text Communications



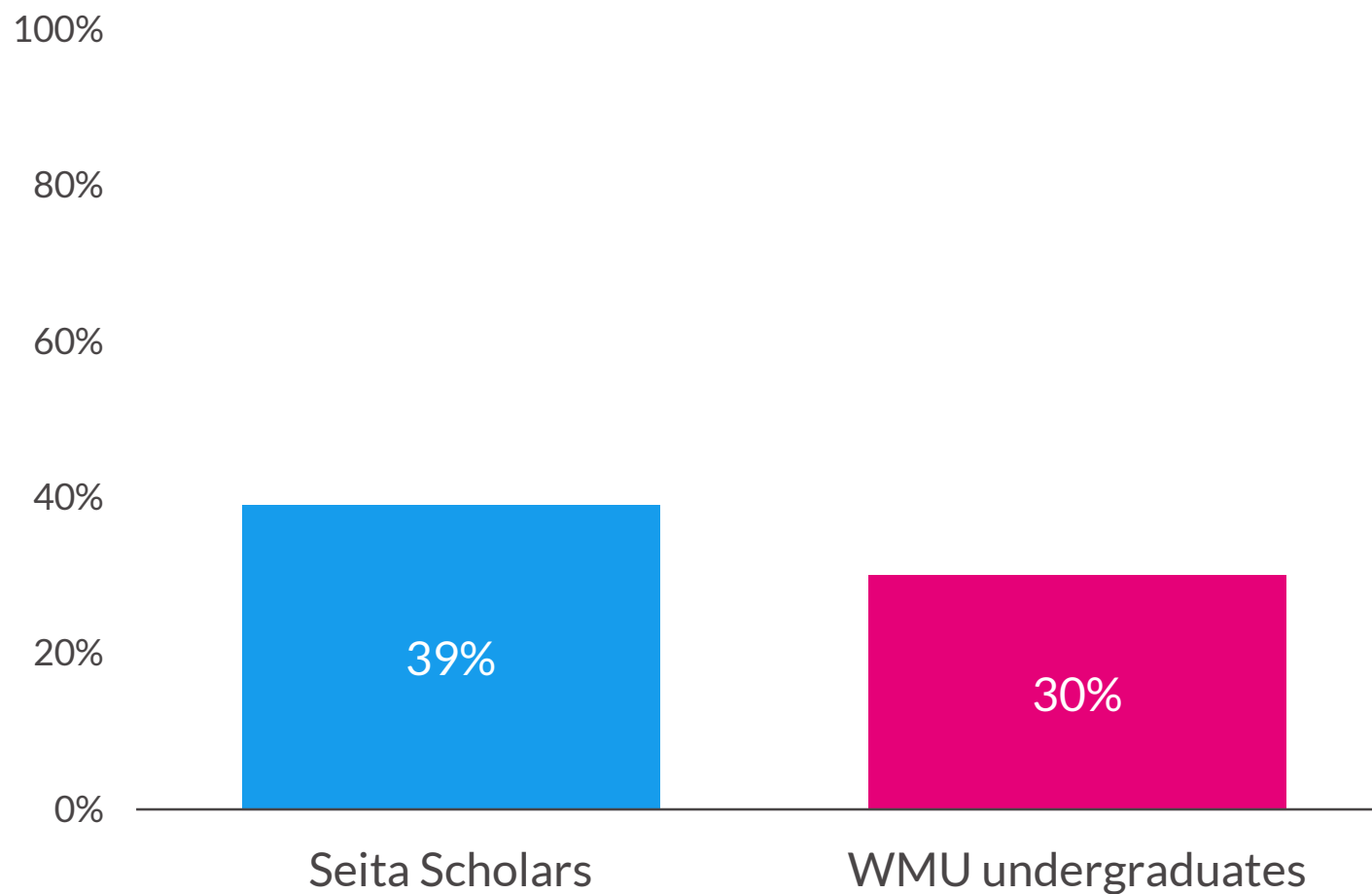
Retention: Seita Scholars versus All WMU Students



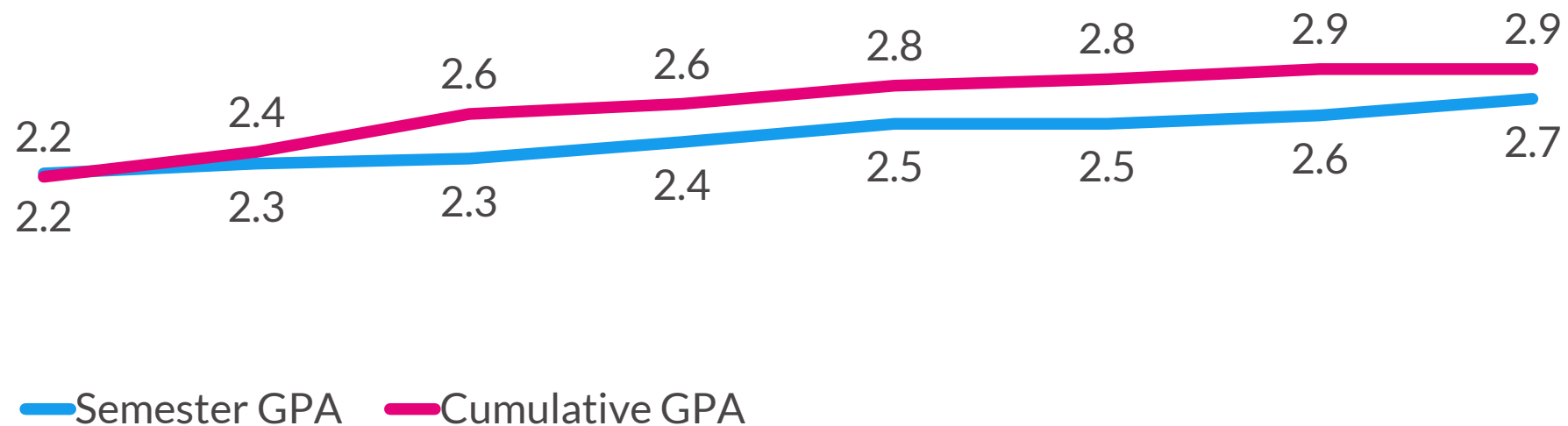
Graduation: Seita Scholars versus All WMU Students



Transfer Rate: Seita Scholars versus All WMU Students

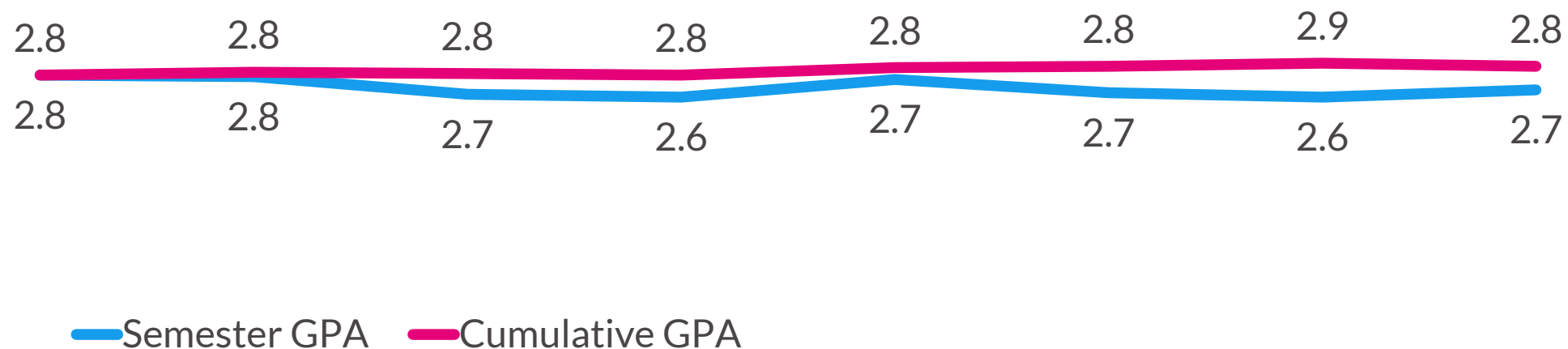


Average Semester and Cumulative GPAs: All Students



Year 1 Fall Year 1 Spring Year 2 Fall Year 2 Spring Year 3 Fall Year 3 Spring Year 4 Fall Year 4 Spring

Average Semester and Cumulative GPAs: Persistent Students



Year 1 Fall

Year 1 Spring

Year 2 Fall

Year 2 Spring

Year 3 Fall

Year 3 Spring

Year 4 Fall

Year 4 Spring

Assessment of Potential for Rigorous Evaluation

Could reasonably be expected to achieve intended outcomes ✓

Implementation is largely consistent with the logic model ✓

Data needed to measure service provision and key outcomes are available ✓

Sufficiently large comparison group of nonparticipants can be identified



Potential Options for Rigorous Evaluation

- Replicate the program at another school and conduct an RCT
 - Requires enough students to create both a treatment and a comparison group
- Replicate the program at multiple schools and use a quasi-experimental design to compare the outcomes of students who enrolled pre- and post-implementation
 - Requires significant investments of time and resources
 - Some aspects of the program may be difficult to replicate

Lessons for the Field: Program Developers

- Incorporate a coaching model that focuses on a range of life domains
- Offer a scholarship to attract students who might not otherwise apply to the school
- Cultivate institutional support by encouraging faculty and staff to serve as mentors, advisors, or volunteers and seek input from campus community members
- Ensure that participation does not leave students feeling stigmatized or defensive
- Avoid requirements that give participants fewer options than their peers

Lessons for the Field: Program Evaluators

- College success programs like Seita Scholars are inherently difficult to evaluate
- Difficult to identify a large enough group of students who are eligible for but not participating in the program *or* receiving other similar services
- Need to consider designs other than the traditional individual-level RCT

Seita Scholar's Perspective

A Seita Scholar's Perspective

- My Transition to WMU: As a transfer student and how the Seita Scholars Program helped me.
- Belonging: My feelings of belonging and being part of a community.
- Studying Abroad: The assistance and support I received from the Seita Scholars Program and my campus coach to study abroad twice, and how that enhanced my educational experience.
- Opportunities and Exposure: As a Seita Scholar, the program exposes us to various opportunities that promote professional development and are empowering.

Discussion



Supporting College Students Transitioning Out of Foster Care

A Formative Evaluation Report on the Seita Scholars Program

Amy Dworsky
CHAPIN HALL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

August 2020

Building an evidence base for postsecondary education programs for young people transitioning out of foster care is more important than ever. Economic trends have made postsecondary education increasingly important to self-sufficiency, but research suggests that far too many young people in foster care will not have the educational credentials needed to succeed in this economy without additional supports. These young people need programs that will help close the gap in postsecondary educational attainment between them and their peers.

Live on Urban's website:

<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/supporting-college-students-transitioning-out-foster-care>

Thank you!

Amy Dworsky, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (Presenter)

Ronicka Hamilton, Western Michigan University (Presenter)

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