Guardian Scholars, Pollak Library Partnership Helps First-Time Freshmen

July 1, 2014

Pollak Library can be a daunting place for first-time freshmen. Hundreds of thousands of books lining shelves and stored on the Internet can sometimes be difficult to navigate for even the most seasoned student.

The staff members at the Guardian Scholars program had been hearing from their students that they were overwhelmed and frustrated because they just didn’t know where to start their academic research or who to ask for help in the library.

So Sara Gamez, program director, and Maria Figueroa, administrative support coordinator, met librarians in the spring and agreed to start a partnership in which librarians would offer workshops for freshman from the Guardian Scholars program, as well as offer office hours for those that need more specific help with research.

An initial workshop was held, and the full program will be launched as part of the Guardian Scholars first-year student workshop series in the fall.

"As we have seen, working with this particular population, they will more than likely utilize the resource if they have a name and a face they can attach it to," Gamez said.

Guardian Scholars, established in 1998 in collaboration with the Orangewood Children’s Foundation, assists former foster youth achieve their education and career goals in higher education.

In addition to financial assistance, students receive personalized mentoring and counseling support to help make the transition to adulthood and self-sufficiency.

Currently about 40 scholars participate, with 10 to 15 new scholars entering each year, Gamez said. While between 3 and 11 percent of emancipated foster youth earn a college degree, the Guardian Scholars program boasts a nearly 70 percent graduation rate.
The high graduation rate is due to partnerships like the one with the library.

"These resources for the first-year students help give them an easier transition," Gamez said. "It definitely helps with the first-year retention rate, which is a big goal for our program."

Joy Lambert and Adolfo Prieto are the reference librarians working with the Guardian Scholars. The library is involved in other partnerships, including those with Freshmen Programs and the Chicano Resources Center, as well as offering more than 500 course-integrated library instruction (http://www.library.fullerton.edu/services/library-instruction.php) sessions per year.

"Guardian Scholars is such a cool program that anything that we can do to support those students in their success we are happy and willing to do," Lambert said. "In the few interactions we have had with them, they seem to be a very cohesive group. They are like a family."

Lambert and Prieto plan to hold workshops that help incoming students navigate the library's resources, including appropriate print and electronic resources, as well as provide instruction on possible strategies and techniques.

And that's exactly what Gamez is hoping will lessen scholars frustration and help them be more successful in college.

"And so, if you say, 'go see Joy and Adolfo at the library, they can help you walk through ABC,' that puts a face on the library and relieves the stress for them," Gamez said.

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