

LIS 662

**Cultivating a Relationship
Between the Magnolia Scholars Program
And the Z. Smith Reynolds Library
At Wake Forest University:
An Action Plan**

Christian J. Burris

November 30, 2009

Introduction

Since institutions of higher learning began opening their doors to American students in the early seventeenth century, different students have been introduced to the merits of a college degree. Higher education was originally limited to young white males from the upper social classes, and our society was directed by those who were able to earn one of these advanced degrees. The turn of the centuries has expanded the pool of students to be introduced to the halls of higher education, including women, racial and ethnic minorities, and even older students. The latest group of students to arrive on many college campuses is first generation college students, the first in their families to pursue a college degree. This group of students can also include a wide range of demographics, particularly minority students from the inner city.

Because of their unique status, first generation college students (or first-gens) have been presented a unique set of challenges for their college career. They have been unable to draw upon the knowledge of a college experience as their second generation counterparts readily can (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). They could be unprepared, academically and emotionally, to face the pressures of their first semester on campus, potentially leading to a number of first-gens dropping out before the second semester begins (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, n.d.). Furthermore, first-gens may not have developed the “academic literacy” that would be needed to assimilate into the college classroom (Haras et al., 2008). In spite of these challenges, first-gens are often motivated by the promise of a better life and livelihood. They are often encouraged by their parents, peers, and socio-economic backgrounds that a college education can hold the key to a better future (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Purpose

As more first-gens arrive on college campuses, many institutions have developed specific programs in order to address their needs. The objective of these programs is often twofold: to recruit qualified candidates for enrollment at a particular institution; and then to encourage their retention after the first year and beyond.

This is the mission of the fledgling Magnolia Scholars Program at Wake Forest University. The 2009-2010 academic year represents its first year in operation, and it has been working to establish itself as both an advocate and a support system for the students that it serves. The Magnolia Scholars have been seeking to form active partnerships with aspects of academic and student life on campus. Some of these relationships have been established already, while others have yet to be explored.

An area of particular interest to the Magnolia Scholars is to form an active bond with the Z. Smith Reynolds Library, the undergraduate library on the campus of Wake Forest. This project will detail an action plan to build active links with the Reynolds Library, determine the needs of those incoming students, and examine how library services can respond.

Brief History of the Magnolia Scholars Program

In order to begin this project, I consulted Dr. T. Nathaniel French, Director of the Magnolia Scholars Program, for information about the program itself. He explained that first generation students had been tracked at Wake Forest since at least the 1980s, simply by aspiring students checking a box on their applications. When the University adopted its current strategic plan in April 2006, a section had been included to increase the diversity of the student body on campus. Both the University President and Provost took the initiative to use the information gathered about first generation students from past applications and formalize the efforts to recruit and retain them. To that end, the Magnolia Scholars program was created in the fall of 2008 and admitted its first group of students in the fall of 2009.

Because the program is in its early stages, only a small number of initiatives have been put into place, such as academic advising during campus orientation sessions. Others are still in development as the required partnerships are initiated. A relationship with the Reynolds Library is one of these forthcoming arrangements, and Dr. French indicated his interest to bring this relationship into being. One of the goals of the program has been to introduce the library to the students of the program, as many of them may not have been exposed to a research library before arriving at Wake Forest. In fact, he felt that this project could be used as a discovery tool to determine a starting point for the skills these students currently possessed and examine where the library can be placed in the program to continued academic success.

Methods

The means to gather information will be done in two stages, a survey followed by a focus group. Coordination with Dr. French and his colleagues has been essential during the process of creating the questions for both stages, and they will be essential during the process of data collection.

Survey. A short survey of ten questions will be distributed to all students in the program, with questions of the “yes/no” type as well as multiple choice. The timeframe for surveys to be distributed and returned is anticipated to be one week. The complete list of questions is included in Appendix A.

Focus group. Working with Dr. French, three students will be selected to participate in a focus group to follow up upon the questions posed in the survey. This will be an opportunity to students to respond to questions on a “face-to-face” basis and to comment on these responses in greater detail. Responses will be recorded with the permission of the participants, and they will be archived for further study if necessary. The complete list of questions is included in Appendix B.

Next Steps

Following the completion of the survey and focus group session, the data will be analyzed. As structured, the survey will detail the perceptions of the Magnolia Scholars toward the Reynolds Library and its services, while the focus group will provide a setting for students to describe how the Reynolds Library is responding to their needs or not. A final report will be written to include all aspects of the research that was conducted.

Results from the data collection will be shared with Dr. French and his staff. This will serve two purposes: to provide feedback which can guide the future development of the program and to share the insights of students with administrators that could speak to the effectiveness of the program itself. In turn, the findings will be shared with the dean and administrators of the Reynolds Library, in the hopes that it will serve to enhance its programs for both the Magnolia Scholars and the rest of the students of Wake Forest.

Conclusion

The arrival of first generation students has been a growing trend among students attending institutions of higher learning across America. Administrators have responded to this by creating programs to address the needs of these students, and the Magnolia Scholars program at Wake Forest is no exception. Determining the role of the library in these programs is an important link in the chain for the ongoing success of these students. It is this central idea that will determine how the Reynolds Library can fulfill this role with these new students.

Bibliography

- Haras, C., Lopez, E. M., & Ferry, K. (2008). (Generation 1.5) Latino students and the library: A case study. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 34(5), 425-433. doi: 10.1016/j.acalib.2008.06.004.
- McCarron, G. P., & Inkelas, K. K. (2006). The gap between educational aspirations and attainment for first-generation college students and the role of parental involvement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(5), 534-549. Retrieved September 28, 2009, from http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_college_student_development/v047/47.5mccarron.html.
- Pike, G. R., & Kuh, G. D. (2005). First- and second-generation college students: A comparison of their engagement and intellectual development. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(3), 276-300. Retrieved September 28, 2009, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3838799>.
- Warburton, E. C., Bugarin, R., & Nunez, A. (n.d.). Bridging the gap: academic preparation and postsecondary success of first-generation students. *Education Statistics Quarterly*, 3(3). Retrieved September 28, 2009, from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_3/3_3/q4-2.asp.

Appendix A: Magnolia Scholars Survey Questions

Was information about the Z. Smith Reynolds Library shared with you before your arrival on campus?

Yes

No

Have you received a tour of the Reynolds Library?

Yes

No

How often do you visit the Reynolds Library?

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Never

How often do you visit the website for the Reynolds Library?

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Never

Do you know about the LIB100, an Information Literacy course taught at the Reynolds Library?

Yes

No

Have you done a search using the library catalog?

Yes

No

Do you find library's databases page easy to navigate?

Yes

No

N/A (haven't used databases page)

Has the staff of the Reynolds Library been helpful when you needed it?

Yes

No

N/A (haven't needed library staff)

Has the Reynolds Library been a welcoming place?

Yes

No

N/A (haven't been to the Reynolds Library)

Are you familiar with these services offered by the Reynolds Library (check all that apply):

DVD checkout

Interlibrary loan

Online study room reservations

Personal research sessions

Technology classes

Appendix B: Magnolia Scholars Focus Group Questions

Besides your school library, did you have any experience with libraries before coming to Wake Forest?

Do you know about “Wake the Library” during exams?

Has your experience with the Reynolds Library been a positive one?

Have you had any difficulty using the Reynolds Library’s online resources?

Are you familiar with the technology courses offered by the Reynolds Library?

What are services that you would like to see offered by the Reynolds Library?

Do you have any other comments?