

Smith Renaissance Society

NEWS

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Smith Renaissance stays the course

In the words of Oakes College founding provost Herman Blake, the Smith Renaissance Society continues to “keep on keeping on” despite the disheartening challenges of the Great Recession. We began the year with fifty-nine Collegiate Fellows, sixteen of whom are new. Friends like you enable us to continue to offer each student a \$1,000 grant and access to paid leadership options. Loyal volunteers enable us to provide a mentor to every student who requests one and workshops aimed at their academic and personal success. Financial aid adviser Cheryl Perazzo and SRS student adviser Amy Hamel, large-souled, loving professionals, constantly go the extra mile to help our students solve problems and stay focused on their studies, which undoubtedly helps account for our great retention and graduation rates. But the big news this year is the awesome way UCSC’s admissions folks are helping create the possibility that smart foster kids throughout California will soon stand a real shot at admission.

Cheryl Perazzo on financial aid challenges

This is one of the most challenging years I have experienced in the 26 years I have worked in the UC Santa Cruz Financial Aid Office. The number of aid applications is increasing due to the troubled economy. Many students and families are struggling and we receive appeals for additional aid on a daily basis. Unfortunately, there is not enough funding to meet the need. Even the funding for the Chafee Grant, a federal grant for former foster youth, is limited. Eight years ago when the Chafee Grant Program began, every eligible foster youth received an award. Now there are more eligible students than funding. This year, each student is awarded at least \$7,500 in loans and \$1,500 in work study. This loan/work



SRS Financial Aid Adviser Cheryl Perazzo

expectation is frightening to many students who will graduate owing more than \$30,000 in loans. This is especially challenging for our Smith Renaissance students since they must also figure out a way to support themselves during the breaks between quarters and during the summer. While other students will live at home during the summer and save money for the coming academic year, our Smith Renaissance students will need all their earnings just to pay for their food and housing over the summer. This is assuming that they can find a job. There are not adequate work opportunities either on or off campus to meet the student demand. A high percentage of UCSC students need employment but only a small percentage of them are hired.

When the Page and Eloise Smith Scholarship began in the 1999-2000 academic year, the registration fees for the year were \$4,235 and the total cost to attend UCSC while living on-campus was \$13,955. For the current academic year (2010-11), the registration fees are \$12,732 for the year and the total cost to attend UCSC while living on-campus is \$30,702! Every penny counts when costs are so high. This scholarship is making a difference in the lives of these amazing students. A college education is going to give our students options in life that they wouldn't have had otherwise.

Mentoring going strong says Gary Miles

This year 36 Senior Fellows are mentoring 37 students, the largest number we have yet served. In this, my tenth year as mentor coordinator, I am struck by the dedication of our mentors despite the current economic difficulties. Employers have cut back on their work forces, pressing remaining employees to work harder and longer hours. Many of our Senior Fellows have felt this, from



Professor Gary Miles

University employees, who are seeing more demanding work conditions across the board, to small business owners who share increased workloads with their employees. Despite this our mentor pool has grown

and our core of experienced mentors is more willing than ever to make themselves available to students. I am profoundly grateful for their commitment.



Elvira Contreras & mentor Buzz Anderson

Our mentors' value to their students often does not stop on graduation, but often increases. This has been especially true the past few years. When I began coordinating the mentor program, upon graduation students could look forward with confidence to a job or admission to a graduate or professional program. The recession has changed that. Jobs are scarce and admission to graduate and professional programs has become correspondingly more competitive. Increasingly, college graduates return home to a safe haven while they continue a protracted search for jobs or work at minimum wage jobs while they await better opportunities. This is not an option for most of our Smith Renaissance students. I am awed



Darius Brown and SRS student adviser Amy Hamel

by the determination and hope with which they prepare for graduation. They need all the support they can get to help them succeed now and prepare for

the challenges ahead. They turn to trusted mentors for advice and support when they face the complex choices and dilemmas that they encounter after graduation.

Amazing Grace: the admissions saga

We have done outreach for a decade, bringing groups of foster kids to the campus, sending students out to speak to them where they are. Over the years we have connect-

ed with hundreds of pre-college foster youths. The University's Admissions folks have always been a huge help, but our efforts have tended to be unfocused; few kids we hosted were realistic candidates for UC admission, and the odds were against our knowing who they were. This began to change a couple of years ago when, egged on



Foster kids climb Cowell steps

by our own Cheryl Perazzo, the University of California added to its admissions application a place for current and former foster youths to self identify, allowing the University and us to reach those who aspire to attend UCSC earlier in the process.

Things moved into high gear last year when Michelle Whittingham, UCSC's Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management, encouraged her team to focus in ways that now make it realistic to imagine the day when all bright foster kids in California can know that UCSC and Smith Renaissance exist, that they have a chance to connect with a person or persons in their home county who will help them navigate the admissions process, and that if UCSC chooses them, and they choose us, the odds of their graduating from the University are very high.

At a practical level, four developments have powered us forward:

1. UCSC added a box to Slug Connection, its new admissions prospects software, that allows foster youths to



D.J., Michelle, Brandy, and Mario

self-identify before they ever apply for admission, giving their contact information, including e-mail addresses, and letting us know if they want to stay connected. This could be huge. Foster kids tend to get moved around a lot. Now those who might want to be considered by UCSC, or simply want to be invited to our outreach events, won't get lost.

2. Ebony Lewis, Associate Director of Admissions Outreach, now serves on our SRS board, greatly increasing the odds that our outreach efforts will be all of a piece and have strategic focus.

3. Ebony's team of admissions field reps, deployed to every county in California, have learned about us and are encouraged to reach out to foster youths and their caregivers in their communities.

4. Three of our Collegiate Fellows have received formal admissions tour guide training, with more on the way.

At last May's Music Day (a fun day when we invite foster kids to the campus to taste college, experience the joy of music, and express what is in their hearts), for probably the first time in human



Associate Director of Admissions Ebony Lewis

history, Ebony ended a brief admissions presentation to foster kids by singing a powerful rendition of Amazing Grace worthy of Aretha Franklin. Marry such poetry to the practical and you give young people real hope, too often in short supply these days.

Ventura Highway

Last month Laura Welbourn and Raymond Franco did what responsible parents of kids reaching college age would do: they drove them to the campus from Ventura County for a Preview Day visit, stopping at San Jose State along the way. But Laura (Oakes '93) and Ray (Oakes '99) are not parents of the nine kids they brought. She is the Foster Youth Services Coordinator



UCSC alums Laura Welbourn and Raymond Franco

for the Ventura County Office of Education. He is a Ventura County Child Services social worker. Together with Ray's colleague Jiann Pemberton, they just care enough to extend themselves.

Spending Friday night in University housing, on Saturday, after an admissions presentation, they joined foster youths from other counties for a campus tour led by three of our Collegiate Fellows, finishing with lunch in the Cowell Dining Hall, where they spent time with a larger cohort of our students. Says Ray, *"This experience provided the youth of Ventura County with a tangible view and information on the possibility of their ability to attend UCSC. It motivated them to strive for more than what is in Ventura County. And it facilitated relationships among themselves and other positive college-bound foster youths. One youth said she loved the school but it was not*

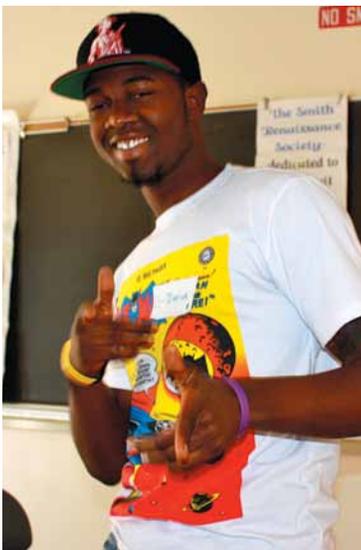
a personal fit for her. So the experience had the value of providing our youths with insights into their own likes and dislikes so they can better choose an academic setting for what will fit them best and where they can be successful."

Adds Laura, *"Our youths saw a campus far from home, expanding their horizons. I've never talked to a youth who told me they want to go to college far from Ventura County—they don't see that as a possibility. They heard from other foster youth 'If I can do it, you can do it!' They were taken there by adults who care about them and believe in them. They know they will continue to have support if they do go to a university. They also saw the network of support on campus. Having lunch on campus and staying in a dorm setting was a bonus—it gave the youth a glimpse what it would be like for them if they lived on campus or in that dorm. I think the dorm rooms and the all-you-can-eat meal really impressed some of them! We appreciated the opportunity to take a group photo at the end with the Smith sign. I'm hoping that some of the youth will post that in their rooms to remind them of the possibilities in their lives."*

If you live in California and would like to help forge a relationship between smart foster youths in your county, Smith Renaissance, and UCSC, please contact Bill Dickinson: wcdcamb@aol.com. Or direct them to UCSC's admissions prospect web site: <https://admissions.sa.ucsc.edu/prospect/>

Pursuit of truth . . .

. . . in the company of friends.



For more information on the Smith Renaissance Society, please contact: Services for Transfer and Re-Entry Students (STARS), (831) 459-4968, smithsociety@ucsc.edu, or visit our web site at www.smithsociety.ucsc.edu.

To make a gift in support of the Smith Society, please contact Kathleen Rose Hughes at 831 459-4552 or online at giving.ucsc.edu/give