

I-year Retention and Graduation Rates of Guardian Scholars

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The Guardian Scholars Program provides academic and personal support services to students who have been in the foster care system and/or experienced homelessness. Participation requires an application consisting of a personal statement, a letter of recommendation, and a letter verifying foster care or homeless status. The Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs requested an analysis of the 1-year retention and graduation rates of Guardian Scholars. There were statistically significant differences in 1-year retention rates between Guardian Scholars and the comparison group for both all students and Pell-eligible entering frosh. Guardian Scholars had a higher graduation rate than the comparison group among all students and Pell-eligible frosh, but the difference was not statistically significant. Many factors other than participation in the Guardian Scholars Program could have contributed to these differences; however, the results of this analysis indicate participating in the Guardian Scholars Program increases 1-year retention and graduation rates.

Background

Two groups were examined: Guardian Scholars participants from the Fall 2014 cohort through the Fall 2020 cohort (N=105) and students in the same cohorts who did not participate in the Guardian Scholars Program (N=14,953). A comparative analysis examined entering frosh who were Pell eligible who did (N=82) and did not (N=8,959) participate in the Guardian Scholars Program. Cohorts were combined to allow for a chi-squared test to be performed to determine any differences between the two groups¹. Comparisons should be made with caution due to small cell sizes.

Important note: Because there are many factors that could account for associations between Guardian Scholars participation and the outcomes of interest, no causal conclusions can be made regarding whether Guardian Scholars participation caused changes in one-year retention and graduation rates.

For disaggregated descriptive data by race/ethnicity, gender, first gen status, and Pell-eligible status, please contact Andrea Hall-Cuccia (ahallcuccia@ucmerced.edu). Statistical tests were not conducted on disaggregated data due to small cell sizes.

¹ A value of $p < .05$ was considered significant.

Section I: 1-year retention

All Guardian Scholars were retained. By comparison, 86% of non-participants and 85% of Pell-eligible entering frosh non-participants were retained (see Fig. 1 and 2)². Differences were statistically significant among all students and among Pell-eligible entering frosh³. Participation in the Guardian Scholars Program increases retention; many factors may influence this association, so the difference cannot be attributed solely or primarily to participation in the Guardian Scholars Program.

Fig. 1: 1-year retention by Guardian Scholar Group—All Students

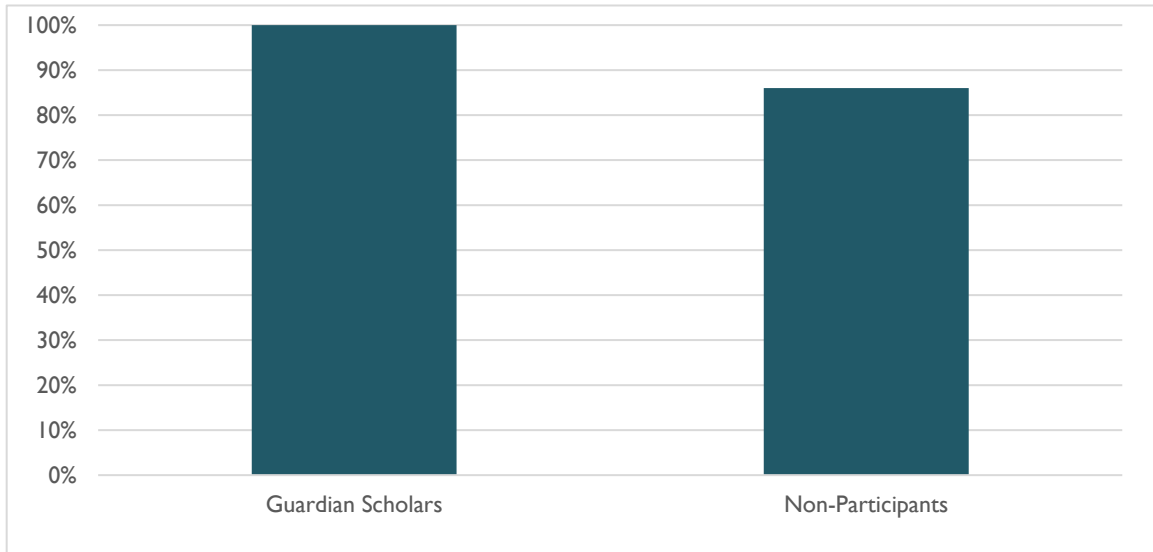
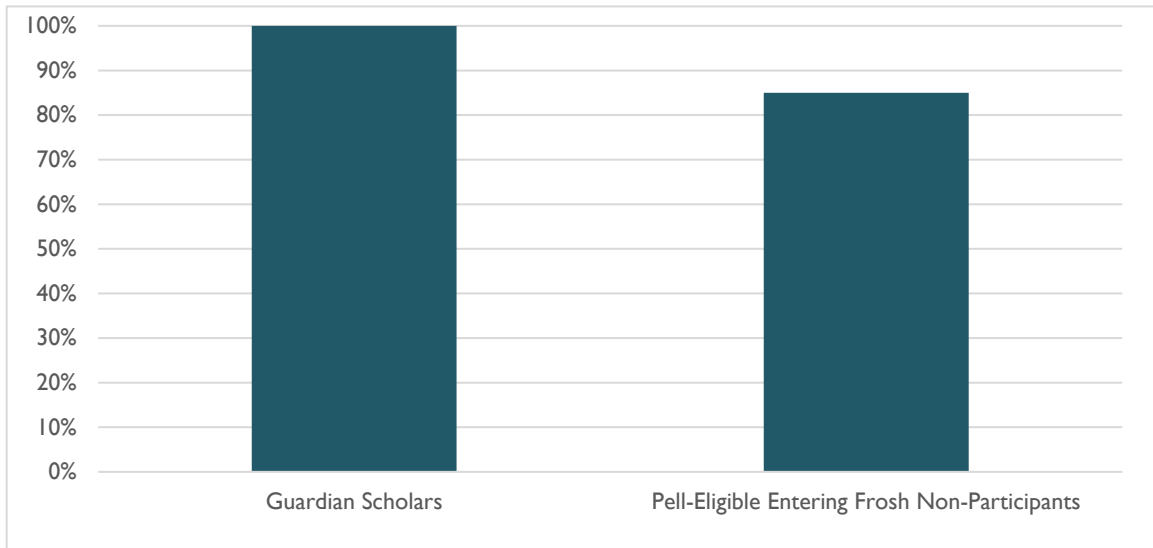


Fig. 2: 1-year retention by Guardian Scholar Group—Pell-eligible Entering Frosh



² Fall 2020 cohort was excluded as they have not been at UC Merced a full year.

³ $p \leq .001$

Section 2: Graduation

Guardian Scholars (76%) had a higher graduation rate than non-participants (60%) and also for Pell-eligible frosh non-participants⁴ (Guardian Scholars = 74%; Pell-eligible entering frosh non-participants = 57%) (see Fig. 3 and 4); however, the difference was not statistically significant for all students⁵ or Pell-eligible entering frosh⁶. Many factors may influence this association, so the difference cannot be attributed solely or primarily to participation in the Guardian Scholars Program.

Fig. 3: Graduation by Guardian Scholar Group—All Students

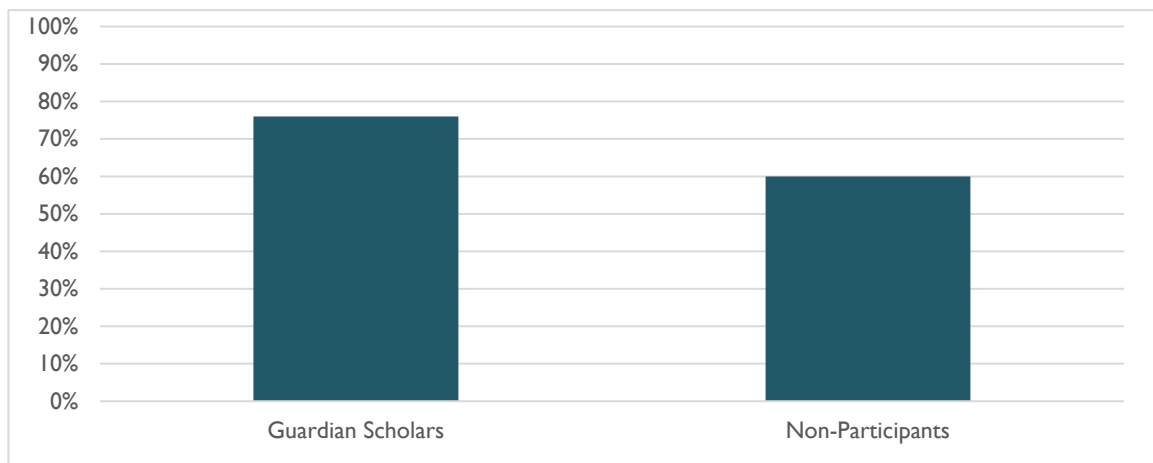
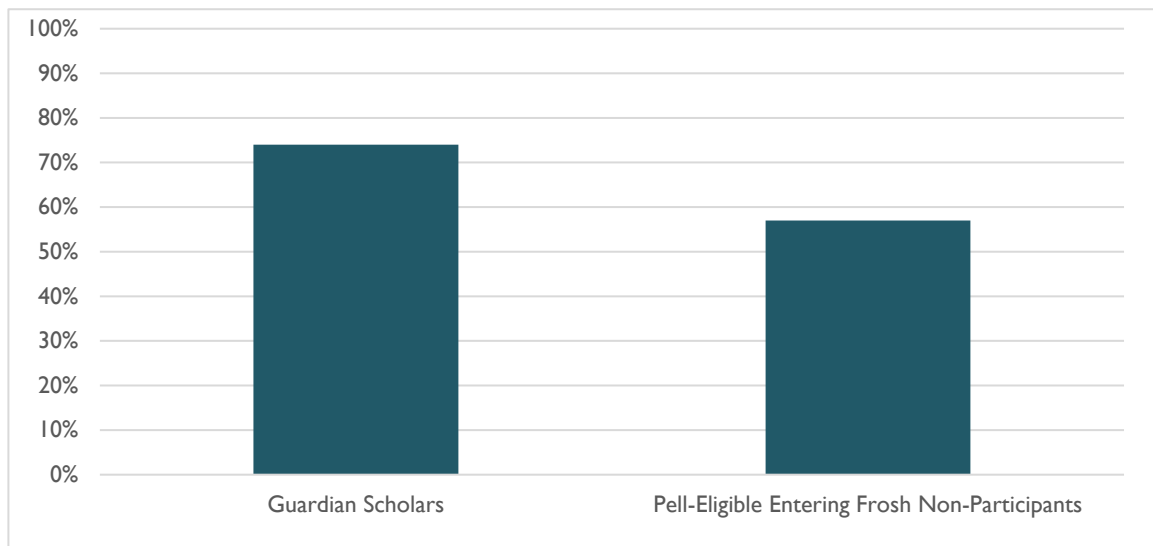


Fig. 4: Graduation by Guardian Scholar Group—Pell-eligible Entering Frosh



⁴ Only frosh cohorts prior to Fall 2017 and transfer cohorts prior to Fall 2019 were included as more recent cohorts may not have had time to graduate.

⁵ $p = .103$

⁶ $p = .102$

Conclusion

There were statistically significant differences in 1-year retention rates between Guardian Scholars and non-participants group for both all students and Pell-eligible entering frosh. Guardian Scholar participation does influence 1-year retention rates. However, many factors influence this association, so the difference cannot be attributed solely or primarily to participation in the Guardian Scholars Program

Guardian Scholars had a higher graduation rate than non-participants among all students and Pell-eligible frosh, but the difference was not statistically significant. Participation in the Guardian Scholars Program increases graduation; however, many factors may influence this association, so the difference cannot be attributed solely or primarily to participation in the Guardian Scholars Program.

Comparisons should be made with caution due to small cell sizes, even with combined cohorts. Analysis could be performed periodically on a combined cohort as the program persists. Pell-eligible entering frosh could continue to be examined, but they do not appear to behave differently from all students.