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New library card works at 5 library systems

FAU, PBCC and school district libraries join county system and West Palm Beach



Akm Momin checks out at book at the S.E. Wimberly Library on the main campus of Florida Atlantic University with the help of Ninoska Worrell. Photo for story on new library collaboration to share materials between five Palm Beach County systems. (Jim Rassol, Sun Sentinel / July 30, 2009)

By Stephanie Wang
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July 30, 2009

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Five local libraries have launched a new lending program, the first of its kind in the state, to make their books and other resources available to each other's card holders.

If you're a patron of any of the libraries -- Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach and those at Palm Beach County public schools, Palm Beach Community College and Florida Atlantic University -- the Sunshine Library Card will let you check out items from all five systems.

"It really complements the types of materials available and gives the library user access to this full range of materials," said Tom Sloan, executive director of the Southeast Florida Library Information Network, which coordinated the agreement.

The sharing service lifts previous borrowing restrictions for unaffiliated visitors.

It's the first collaboration in the state that directly connects academic resources and popular literature -- distinct from the existing Interlibrary Loan, which links the contents of all of Florida's public libraries.

In the few months since the program's spring debut, about 300 people have signed up for the yellow-and-blue card.

Libraries expect the card to benefit high school students taking high-level Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate classes. Retirees, business people and people pursuing degrees may also show interest in checking out academic volumes, while education students may enjoy the ready availability of children's books, Sloan said.

With so many items available in each library's collection, there is little concern about overlapping demand for any one source. Academic texts tend to elaborate on very specific topics, and public libraries order multiple copies of popular books.

"If people came in and denuded our collections like a plague of locusts, we'd really have to rethink it," said Bill Miller, dean of libraries at FAU. A \$10,000 state grant paid start-up costs and continuing costs will be small, Sloan said.

After a year, the five libraries will re-examine the shared-borrowing policies and may consider expanding within Palm Beach County and into other areas of South Florida, Sloan said.

FAU student and library patron Seth Christy, 27, likes the idea of having more books and other materials available.

"The more easily accessible it is, the more educated people can get," he said.

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