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Memo: IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

To apply for Middle College call 306-3120.

High school and college together: the best of both worlds

by Susan Dunn, Mercury News

Why would a high school student want to enroll in college classes before graduation? There are as many reasons why as there are Britney Spears navel sightings.

Credit, for one: Students can jump-start their college careers by earning college credits while simultaneously fulfilling high school requirements.

Savings, for another: Tuition is waived in many "middle college" and concurrent enrollment programs, and books and other expenses are covered, often by grants. So students can save potentially thousands of dollars.

Some teens are simply ready for the intellectual challenge of college-level work, or want to choose from a wider variety of courses. Others may want to get away from "busy work" or might not be reaching their full academic potential in a traditional high school.

Bottom Line? Attending high school and college classes simultaneously encourages students to strive toward academic success, find their niches, and discover a newfound maturity to cope with the challenges and freedom a college environment offers.

Cañada College

At Cañada College in Redwood City, high school juniors and seniors can enroll in Middle College, an educational collaboration with the Sequoia Union High School district. In this program, up to 60 students enroll in high school and college classes simultaneously, all on the Cañada campus.

"Getting high school and college credit at the same time is obviously a huge motivator for these students," says Middle College teacher Mitch Roman.

"There are a variety of reasons kids choose Middle College," he continues. "Some kids want to get ahead on their college careers. Others may not be in sync with the traditional high school "scene" or may be unmotivated. Middle College gives them a more challenging, more mature, more independent learning environment".

"We've actually had some students who finished their A.A. degrees while still in high school," says Roman. "So those kids not only shaved off a couple of years of college, but potentially saved between \$25-\$30,000 in tuition."

For student Erin Lewis, enrolling in Middle College was both an academic and a social decision. "I wasn't really feeling challenged at my old high school," she says.

“I’ve found that kids in Middle College are really open-minded. People are more accepting of ideas,” Lewis continues. Some of the college-level courses she’s enjoyed thus far include Art, American Sign Language, Intermediate Algebra and Interpersonal Communications.

“One thing that I really like is the responsibility that comes with the college courses. It’s taught me how to grow up a little more, and has made me more prepared for college than a lot of my peers,” Lewis comments. She mentions the University of Colorado as a possibility for the future.

Mission College

Middle College at Santa Clara’s Mission College is similar to Cañada’s program and is aimed at intellectually capable, yet disconnected, high school students in the Santa Clara Unified School District. The selection process is rigorous; each year, only 30 junior-level SCUSD students are admitted.

Roughly half of the Middle College curriculum includes college courses. “Being admitted to Middle College is a privilege, with full rights to the educational support services of the college,” explains Mission College President Christopher C. O’Hearn.

According to Middle College instructor Carol Mack, “These kids are more apt to figure out their goals and how to get there. They ask for help from us. They help each other.”

Student Leslie Davis, who would like to continue at Mission College after graduation and eventually transfer to Santa Clara University to study criminal law, says, “The teachers are really cool here; we’re not afraid to ask them questions. They treat us like adults.”

Foothill College

Foothill offers a Middle College program, as well as concurrent enrollment, in which students currently attending a traditional high school can enroll in fee-free classes and earn college credits. After obtaining permission from a parent and their high school principal, “Students can take any classes they qualify for”, says Foothill Outreach Officer Donne Davis.

“For fall, winter and spring quarters, we average about 1,500 concurrently enrolled high school students – and for summer it’s about 3,500,” according to Davis.

Mountain View High School student Jeff Rodgers enrolled in Chemistry 25 at Foothill, “pretty much to get ahead,” he says. “I get college and high school credit, so I thought it would be a good class to take.”

UC-Santa Cruz

UC-Santa Cruz offers a high school honors program, in which high school juniors can apply to the University for their senior year. If admitted, students pay reduced fees and take a reduced course load (up to 10 credits a quarter) while earning college credits. Another bonus of the program is that if students decide to continue at UC-Santa Cruz for their college careers, they can do so without having to apply for admission to the university again.