

Middle College Reaches Record Enrollment

High schoolers receive AA degrees

By Kathy Schrenk

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REDWOOD CITY – For high school student Rob Genevro, college didn't seem like an option.

His grades were low, he hated school and he didn't feel any kind of connection to his classmates.

Luckily, after two years of trudging through his high school classes, he found Middle College, a collaboration between the Sequoia Union High School District and Cañada College.

Now, Genevro aspires to go on to a state school, after he gets both his high school diploma and his associate's degree in May.

Genevro is typical of students taking advantage of this alternative to the typical high school junior and senior years. They spend their school day at Cañada, taking college courses in the morning and taking the requisite high school English and social studies classes in the afternoon.

Thanks to success stories like Genevro's, Middle College student numbers are growing. In this, the program's fourth year at Canada, Middle College is for the first time running at capacity of about 30 juniors and 30 seniors.

Middle College students have an alternative to high school with an expanded selection of classes and the opportunity to graduate from high school and community college at the same time. Then they can start right into the their junior year of college, having had a transitionary period from high school to a big university and saving thousands of dollars on tuition in the process. The program pays for the students' tuition and textbooks.

At their traditional high schools, many Middle College students felt lost in the crowd and never had a sense of being in the right place. In Middle College, the students say they feel more able to work directly with instructors.

At Canada, "instructors made it a lot more clear that they are willing to talk to me," said Genevro.

Like Genevro, high school junior Hayley Jenks felt out of place in one of the Sequoia district's schools. "I didn't feel challenged at all in high school," she said. "I wanted to be in an environment where education was supported, not something to get through." She also finds instructors a lot more accessible than in high school.

English instructor Jen Petroelje and social studies instructor Mitch Roman can sympathize, since they used to have to keep track of 150 students in several different classes while teaching in a big high school.

Ricardo Oseguera came to Middle College for some reasons that are different, but much the same as his classmates. He wants to be a computer programmer, hopefully focusing on animation, and he didn't find any classes in the field that interested him in high school. He also wanted a more mature environment.

All the students say they participate more in extra-curricular activities at Canada. Genevra is a member of the campus Rainbow Alliance and new Christian group, Jenks plays cello and rides horseback, Oseguera tutors 10- to 17-year-olds and senior Denisse Martin Del Campo takes piano. Other Middle College students participate in student government, which students and instructors agree they probably wouldn't have in high school. As Oseguera said, high school politics are "a popularity contest."

Unlike some of the Middle College students, Martin Del Campo didn't feel like she had trouble fitting in. In fact, she fit in almost too well, and found the social aspects of high school to be a distraction.

Another reason many students come to Middle College is because they are interested in the arts and the students often find there aren't enough music options at the high schools.

For instructors Petroelje and Roman, this student-teacher ratio makes working in the program one of the best teaching experiences of their lives. The individual attention students get from them as well as their college instructors make the program a great experience for them, as well.

The Middle College will hold an informational meeting for students, parents and guardians at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 6 in the Sequoia District board room at 480 James St. in Redwood City. For more information, call 306-3120.

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