

THE NEXT STEP

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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GHS juniors explore college/career options.

The cost of college has been a revelation to Kayla Trevino.

Trevino, a Gothenburg High School junior, recently explored life after high school during a college/career workshop.

“It’s also a shocker how soon it’s coming up and how much work it is in finding one,” she said. “There are so many choices.”

High school guidance counselor Jerry Wiggins offers the workshop to juniors to provide useful information and resources in the coming months.

During his 15 years at Gothenburg High School, Wiggins said the process of finding a suitable college and/or career has not changed that much.

“However technology has put its thumbprint on the flow of information,” he said.

For example, Wiggins said admission, federal aid and scholarship applications are almost all online. Colleges also communicate information to admitted students via web-based student portals.

More opportunities, at a younger age, for sophomores and juniors to explore campuses and

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programs are offered, he said.

Wiggins said he still thinks campus tours are the most important when choosing a school.

“There’s no substitute,” he said.

Getting ready for the next step after high school begins in earnest during a student’s freshman year and the choice of classes they take, Wiggins said.

Sophomores explore different careers and juniors take an in-depth look at post-secondary options such as two- and four-year colleges, the armed forces and apprenticeships.

Senior year is about touring campuses, completing applications and vying for financial aid awards, he said.

Wiggins said the spring of a student’s senior year is focused on narrowing college selections, accepting college aid packages, completing federal aid requirements, applying for housing, registering for classes and more.

The transition from high school to a post-secondary program is usually complete around the first week in June, he said.

Wiggins said Educationquest, a free online service, can help students with college plans.

Scholarship application information, which students provide, is placed, maintained and updated in the service’s statewide data base Scholarshipquest.

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Unfortunately, there's not a single, online application for local awards which Wiggins said would make life easier for students.

"I floated this idea by various organizations and families a few years ago and met with resistance," he said. "Each group or committee seems to want their own essays and/or specific questions answered by applicants."

Nonetheless, Wiggins said he's not given up the idea of a "common" application.

Wiggins pointed out that parents are an integral part of the college/career process.

Parents are included in two workshops he offers and he also tries to keep them updated with monthly newsletters during a student's senior year.

But it's up to students to stay organized and to identify and meet deadlines, he said, noting that parents can assist by insuring tasks are completed in a timely manner.

"That can sure relieve a lot of stress," Wiggins said.

Learning how to register for college and what information is needed has been helpful for junior Chase Dachtler.

At this point, Dachtler plans to attend the University of Nebraska at Kearney and pursue a career in physical therapy.

For junior Brittany Melvin, doing an in-depth comparison of two colleges has been the most useful.

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Melvin is also looking at UNK and is interested in law.

Trevino is exploring what's offered at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and also the University of Texas.

"I'd like to be a Longhorn," she confessed.

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