

Living Well and Gearing Up for Higher Education

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The beginning of the year is a time in which all those things related to college kick off. Beginning college is a struggle for all who enter, be it a high school senior, a young adult after taking a few semesters off, or a non-traditional student. All of those who decide to tread that unbeaten path struggle to navigate through financial aid and admissions. This week, I intend to share a few pointers for those who intend to take on the task of beginning college this year.

To prevent this all from becoming far too hard to conquer, students should begin thinking about their choices for majors and careers in their junior year of high school. There are several resources that can be found online or in libraries that can prove to be good sources of information about careers. Students should see their school counselor or admission counselor of the college of their choice for information regarding the correct high school courses for admission to the college. These resources can also provide information about the right test to take for admission and even the median test scores. College and career fairs can also be very helpful in making decisions concerning college.

High school seniors planning to begin college in the fall should use this time of year to develop an action plan for applying to schools and scholarships. Most schools have an application deadline sometime in spring for admission that fall. Many scholarship programs, as well, begin to accept applications for consideration and these programs can really help the pocketbook! High school seniors should jump at the first opportunity to take either the SAT or ACT dependent upon what your school of choice requires. Students should consider making visits to the campuses of their choice to get a feel for whether or not they really want to attend classes there. Early in the year is when most admission deadlines pass so don't wait!

Non-traditional students should follow many of the same steps as high school seniors looking to attend college in the fall. Read all correspondence carefully and take special care not to miss deadlines. Add important deadlines to your planner to help you keep them. Again make sure you have taken the appropriate tests for admission. Non-traditional students should also make sure to visit campus and possibly even speak with department heads or professors concerning opportunities especially for you.

Financial aid applications are generally available January 1 as is the FAFSA form. The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) allows students to obtain aid from programs and schools. Many times by simply filling out this form students can become eligible for programs that they wouldn't have known about otherwise. Copies of the FAFSA application can be found at schools and can even be filled out online. Students should also check with their counselor on campus and in their high school to inquire about other scholarships that might be available. And if all of these avenues have been crossed with no luck, don't fret, you can always go online to many different free search engines that can narrow scholarships down to only those for which you qualify.

So use your time wisely and create a plan. Find out when all of the school deadlines are and what has to be completed before the application deadlines. Write these dates down and get organized! Class starting dates will be rolling in quickly but even more quickly will be the application deadlines. Good luck to all potential students for the fall. For more information on getting organized for college and where to find resources contact the Baker County Extension Office at (904)259-3520.