



LEARNING TIME - Students sign in and discuss the day on April 26 during a free college course for high school seniors sponsored by DeVry University at the Aero Institute in Palmdale.

BERNARD KANE/Valley Press

DeVry offers free classes for high school students

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PALMDALE - Area high school seniors have a new opportunity to jump-start their college careers or just "try on" the college experience.

DeVry University's recently opened Palmdale center is offering free college courses to high school students in its Passport2College program.

"It's really like a college test drive," said Kimberly Irizarry, dean of the Palmdale center.

The first course offered in the program, Critical Thinking, finished its eight-week run April 26. Some 30 students completed the course, although nearly twice that number had expressed interest at the start, Irizarry said.

"What was really exciting to me was to see all the students who keep coming back" despite proms, senior projects and other end-of-senior-year activities and distractions, she said.

"It is a testament to how committed these kids are that they want to spend their Saturdays" in class, spokesman Dan Dement said.

One goal of the introductory course was to emphasize "this is college, not high school," Irizarry said, and to explain the differences and set out expectations for a college career.

The course succeeded in generating enthusiasm for college in Juan Casteolano. The 16-year-old Guidance Charter School student will graduate this spring and plans to study computer information systems at DeVry.

"It got me really hyped up for it," he said of the course. "It was a very wonderful experience. They made us use our brain a lot."

He also enjoyed meeting the other students in the course.

"Everybody was into it and respectful. Everybody was eager to learn," Casteolano said.

The courses are open not only to those who hope to pursue technical degrees with DeVry but to students with a variety of interests and goals.

The program offers a chance to get ahead with some college classes for free even if they do not directly pertain to a student's area of interest.

Joseph Madrigal saw the program as a chance to jump-start his college career for free. The Lancaster teen is looking at DeVry as a possibility for a degree in robotics.

"I think it's a very good class. I enjoy the instructor and I enjoy everything I've learned so far," he said as the course drew to a close. "It's helping me get my feet wet."

As a home-schooled student, the program offered Madrigal a chance to work with others in a team situation and to take classes face-to-face with his instructor. Much of his schooling has been in online courses.

"It opened my mind to think outside the box," he said.

Because DeVry is an accredited university, course credits are transferable to any other college, including the University of California and California State University systems, Dement said.

Although the courses are free, students are responsible for purchasing books or other class materials.

"We're just here to make that college experience possible," Dement said, giving students who want to attend college as many opportunities as possible.

Students meet Saturday mornings for 3½ hours of in-person instruction. In addition, each course has approximately two hours of online instruction a week.

The program offers an opportunity to experience a taste of college, which may encourage even those who have not excelled in high school.

"Some kids actually like the college experience better than the high school experience," Dement said.

"They find their niche when they come to DeVry."

The Passport2College program, which varies at each DeVry center, is tailored to meet the needs of the area, Irizarry said.

The program was presented to area high schools to gauge the interest of local students before the center decided to offer it.

"The response was overwhelming," she said. The second course, Introduction to Business, begins today and is open to any interested high school senior, whether or not he or she took the initial course.

Students interested in enrolling in the Passport2College program can call DeVry at (661) 224-2920.