

Bright students can start college early Advanced Academy: They can earn high school and university credits in West Georgia program.

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The search is on for at least 30 sophomores and juniors across the state who are too **advanced** to be challenged by high school but too young to get their diplomas.

Starting in September, the chosen few will be allowed to skip their last year or two of high school to study in residence at **West Georgia** College, getting college and high school credit simultaneously. They will come back to their hometown high schools to pick up diplomas when their peers graduate.

The program, the **Advanced Academy**, is the brainchild of Beheruz N. Sethna, inaugurated Wednesday as president of **West Georgia** College. He modeled the **academy** on similar programs with which he worked at universities in New York and Texas. Sethna, who specializes in marketing, called the **academy** a "win, win, win, win" concept, his winners being the students, their parents, the University System and the high schools.

His explanation goes like this: The students - who must have SAT scores of at least 1,000 out of 1,600, be recommended by teachers and be interviewed at the college - get to escape a high school that has ceased to challenge them. The parents save on the cost of college, since the state will pay the tuition, leaving only the cost of room and board.

The University System wins because students who might otherwise leave for, say, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will be more likely to consider a smooth transition to an in-state college such as **Georgia** Tech instead.

The benefit to the high schools, Sethna admits, is harder to see. The schools can count the student's grades and SAT scores in their overall record but with one less body crowding their classrooms; in other words, Sethna suggested, they enjoy the honor without the expense.

"The high school has the awkward situation of not being able to meet their needs," he said.

The **academy**, in this sense, is not related to a broad vision of University System Chancellor Stephen Portch to pressure and help high schools to do a better job of preparing students for college. Portch plans to design a privately funded program to give up to 250,000 at-risk high school students summer and weekly programs on state college campuses throughout all four years of high school.

The difference between high school and college is already appreciated by Warner Robins High senior Fikisha Swader, one of three high school seniors studying and staying at **West Georgia** College full time.

"In high school, you're more or less persuaded to conform," said Swader, a National Achievement

Award finalist who will be going to Howard University next year. "In college, you're more or less persuaded to excel."

She criticizes the **Advanced Academy** only for the way the participants will live apart from regular students under close supervision. **Academy** students will live in two dorm wings separated by gender, with house parents and an 11 p.m. curfew on school nights.

"When you're 15, I can understand that," she said. "But there are going to be seniors [back in high school] who have more freedom than those in the **Advanced Academy**."

For information or application forms, contact Diane Boothe, director of The **Advanced Academy** of **Georgia**, in Carrollton: 404-836-4437.

Photo: Fikisha Swader is one of three high school seniors who are studying and staying at **West Georgia** College full time as part of the **Advanced Academy**. She said she finds more expectation to excel in college than in high school. / Kimberly Smith / Staff