



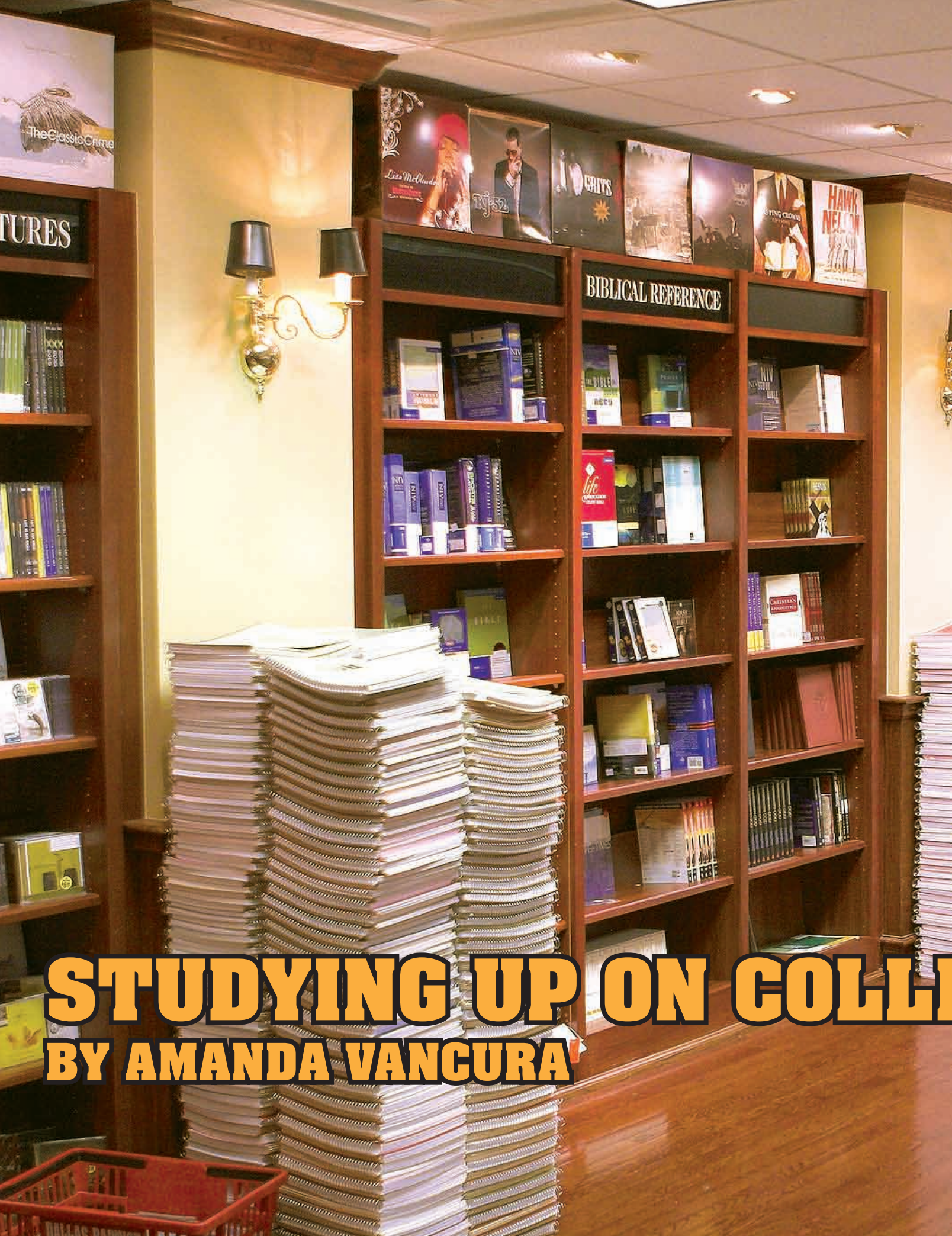
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STUDYING UP ON COLLEGE

BY AMANDA VANCURA



Dallas Baptist University bookstore
photo by Chris Fritchie

COLLEGE PLANNING

IT SEEMS LIKE JUST YESTERDAY your precious child was packing his or her first backpack, moving beyond the elementary years into middle school and becoming a very grown-up student before your eyes. Today, you're looking ahead to when the college corridors will soon replace the locker-lined halls of high school.

That's right. College is coming. At times, the whole idea can be just as overwhelming for parents as it is for students. Whether it's filling out applications, visiting campuses, making deadlines, or figuring out finances, there are a lot of important decisions to make. To make it easier, there are many resources and options available right here in Frisco. Students can ease into college by taking classes at Collin County Community College or delve into a four-year degree at Dallas Baptist University (DBU), now with a new Frisco campus off Internet Blvd. in Hall Office Park.

No matter where your student decides to go, if you know what to expect, you'll be more at ease when it's time for your student to head off into the world of higher education.

HIGH SCHOOL PREPARATION

Is it too early for a freshman to start thinking about college? According to The Princeton Review, an organization that specializes in test preparation, the four years of high school is the perfect amount of time to prepare.

Throughout the high school years, students are within reach of numerous resources that will help them get into the college of their dreams. But it's important to outline a plan and stick to it.

GPA is key. In today's college world, applicants have to have the grades to back themselves up. Establishing a strong grade point average (GPA) as a freshman can be a good start to a successful high

COLLEGE PREPARATION
CHECKLIST9th Grade

- Take challenging courses in a variety of subject areas.
- Talk to adults in a variety of professions to determine what type of education is needed.

10th Grade

- Become involved in activities that interest you and/or allow you to explore career interests.
- Meet with your guidance counselor to discuss colleges and requirements.
- Consider taking the Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT).
- Start visiting colleges and talking to students.

11th Grade

- Decide which colleges interest you, ask about admissions requirements, financial aid, & deadlines.
- Attend college fairs, and continue to visit colleges.
- Ask for recommendations from teachers, counselors and employers.
- Research financial aid from federal, state, local and private sources.
- Investigate the availability of scholarships from corporations, unions, associations, religious organizations, and credit unions.
- Look for directories of scholarships for women, minorities, and disabled students at the library.
- Register for and take the SAT/ACT.

12th Grade

- Meet with your counselor early in the year to discuss your plans.
- Complete necessary financial aid paperwork, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at www.fafsa.ed.gov
- Write colleges to request information and applications.
- Visit colleges.
- Take the SAT/ACT again if not satisfied with scores.
- Prepare your application carefully. Pay close attention to deadlines.

Provided by the Department of Education,
www.studentaid.ed.gov/pubs



Students on the way to class

photo by Chris Fritchie

school career.

Get involved. School is more than just grades. Colleges also consider the extracurricular activities, community involvement and special talents/skills of students. Toni Chandler, DFW regional recruiter for Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) says she looks for students who want to grow as a person.

“It is our mission to prepare students for the future, and that means learning about your community and how to work with people,” she says. “When I meet a student who is looking for that, as well, I know we may have a great match. When students are looking for a college experience that is personal and where people will know them and their accomplishments, I know SFA could be a great place for them.”

Take standardized tests early. Most high school students take the SAT, but most colleges also accept the ACT. Because colleges take the standardized tests scores very seriously, consider having your child take one or the other during their junior year.

“Often students are not fully satisfied with the SAT/ACT score the first, or even the second time they take the test. So, getting the first test under your belt as a

junior allows you more time to retest, if desired,” suggests Ms. Chandler.

Be sure to have your son or daughter prepare well in advance by picking up an SAT or ACT prep book and/or taking a test-prep course.

Advance coursework is beneficial for not only admissions, but may also be looked at when a student is being considered for scholarships.

Talk money. Sit down with your child and discuss how the finances will be handled for their college education. You may have a fund set up for your student, or you may choose to research financial aid options and scholarship opportunities. Consider the cost of the college your child wants to attend and research all options for loans, grants and scholarships. The high school guidance

*Dallas Baptist University campus
photo by Chris Fritchie*

counselor can be a great resource when it comes to these questions.

Consider the courses. Think wisely about having your son or daughter take advance placement courses. Although some colleges do look very closely at these courses, you don't want them to bring down your child's GPA. A child who excels and is making good grades in a certain area, may not necessarily perform at the same level when taking a more challenging advanced course.

"Advance coursework is beneficial for not only admissions, but may also be looked at when a student is being considered for scholarships," Ms. Chandler explains. "However, if a student does not excel in a particular area...and would do poorly if they took the advanced course, they could hurt their GPA more than they helped it. Students and parents need to really talk about the student's desire and ability to handle the advanced coursework in each subject area."

Should your child take dual-credit courses? Although dual-credit courses are not a necessity, they can be beneficial if your child is up for the challenge. It will help give him or her a peek into what a college-level course may be like.

"College is a lot different from high school, and dual credit helps to minimize the shock that comes over most incoming college freshman," says Layna Evans, director of marketing for Dallas Baptist University (DBU). "It encourages a student to excel to higher education after graduation...and it offers an opportunity to high school students to gain college credits at a minimal expense."

Ms. Chandler agrees and adds that it can also provide more flexibility in their college course scheduling.

"Since they will already have a number of basics out of the way, students will then have the option of taking a lighter course load during a semester that will be potentially challenging for them," she says. "For students who want to 'get out fast,' enjoy a challenge or may want to double major, this can also be an excellent option."



MAKING THE CHOICE

You've helped your child outline a high school plan. Now you must assist them in selecting where he or she will spend the next four years. Ms. Evans suggests parents and students sit down and make a list of expectations they would like to have met from a college or university. Then, "visit, visit, visit," says Ms. Chandler.

"Students should start the information gathering process as a freshman in high school," Ms. Chandler suggests. "One of the number one ways I encourage students to start thinking about what they want in a school is to go and visit several varied campuses – small, private, state, large, rural and city. This way, they can start to narrow their field and

know what they really want in a school and where to look for it. If possible, freshmen and sophomores should go online to university websites and attend area college fairs to gather brochures and ask questions."

Here are some other things to consider when making that all-important decision.

Location. Does your child want to stay close to home? Do they want a different climate? Remember, you're not just selecting a school, but a home.

Size. Larger schools are usually more diverse when it comes to courses, activities and students. In addition, if they are in a larger city, there may be more employment opportunities. However, smaller schools offer smaller classes.

In addition, there is an opportunity to know most of the people in your class, as well as the administration.

Ms. Evans says that DBU, as a private school, strives to offer smaller class sizes to students.

“Does the student want to be in a classroom with 400 other students or a classroom with 30 students?” she asks. “Students do not just need to gain credit from a course, they also need to retain the knowledge from the classroom to the professional world.”

Accreditation. Consider whether your child should attend a college that has been accredited by the United States Department of Education. According to Ms. Evans, this is an important question that is easily, and often, overlooked.

“This is vital to the student’s future education,” she believes.

For information on accreditation, visit www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred.

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Academic Programs. What skills does your son or daughter want to develop? Consider their hobbies and if they want to develop them into a career. If your child knows their major, have them to talk to others in that field about the schools they attended. Or, if your teenager isn’t sure about a major, choose a school with a variety of classes and majors. Then, they can talk with the college counselor about narrowing down a choice.

Campus Life. This is where your child will live for at least the next four years. It’s important for students to have a balance between academics and campus life. Take a look at the extracurricular activities available, sports programs, special interest groups, fraternities or sororities, etc. Ask about housing and

The logo for Frisco Style Magazine features a large, stylized 'FSM' monogram in white on a red square background. To the right of the monogram, the word 'frisco' is written in a cursive script, and 'STYLE MAGAZINE' is written in a bold, serif font.

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*Athletic scholarships help many students
photo by Chris Fritchie*



Questions to Ask on Your College Visits

ACADEMIC

- What are the admission requirements?
- Do you accept advanced placement credit or credit-by-examination?
- What are the college's academic program majors?
- What is the student-faculty ratio?

COST

- Including living expenses, what is the total cost for one year?
- What is taken into consideration for financial aid?
- What scholarship opportunities are available?
- Is there an application fee and is there a deadline?

EXTRACURRICULAR

- What student life opportunities are available on campus?
- What clubs and organizations exist on campus?
- What kind of athletic teams does the school sponsor?
- What recreational facilities/activities are available for student use?
- What volunteer/community service opportunities are available?

SERVICES

- What academic support services are available, such as writing, language, and math labs?
- Is there wireless remote access available for students?
- Is there a career center, and what services does it provide?

the percentage of students who live off-campus versus on-campus. Once again, visiting a campus can give your student a better idea of the campus life.

"Yes, the Internet and brochures are helpful, but actually walking the campus and talking with the faculty and staff will let a student decide if they could see themselves here," says Ms. Chandler.

Retention. Good retention and graduation rates may be indicators that students are successful in a college program. This tells you, as a parent, that good academic, social and financial systems are in place to assist your son or daughter in their journey. Be sure to find out what percentage of students stay for the entire program and graduate.

PRIVATE, PUBLIC, OR COMMUNITY?

One last thing to consider when choosing a college is the type of school. Does your child want to attend a private Christian university, a public institution or a community college?

Cost difference. The biggest difference many people notice about public versus private universities is the cost. State schools are more affordable. For example, for a student to attend the University of Texas during the Fall 2006 semester, they would pay a flat-rate cost of between \$2,985 - \$3,017 for 12-plus hours (based on a Texas resident). If your child wants to attend Southern Methodist University, the tuition is \$25,400 for the 2006-2007 school year.

Religious affiliations. The choice to attend public or private all comes down to personal choice and what will work better for your student. Many private universities have a religious base, which parents and students may see as a benefit.

"Parents have shared that they do not want the truths they have taken years to invest and build in the minds and hearts of a son or daughter to be undermined in the college years," explains Ms. Evans. "In an age when higher education is influenced by political correctness and



A typical classroom setting

photo by Chris Fritchie

moral relativism, this is a valid concern.”

Class size. Private universities also tend to offer smaller class sizes, allowing students to become more involved in their classes.

“Classes are smaller, permitting interaction and opportunity to ask questions,” says Ms. Evans. “Professors with the academic credentials as well as a mature faith often become role models, mentors and lifelong friends to the students.”

When helping your child make a list of colleges, it’s probably best to consider private and public. Seek out the colleges that offer what your son or daughter is looking for in academics, size, activities, religious affiliation and campus life.

Community colleges. At times, students aren’t quite ready to enter the university world. Some smaller schools may help ease their anxieties.

“Parents and students often ask about the difference between a community college and a private university. Maturity is the key word,” believes Ms. Evans. “Students can go almost anywhere and take a class and get credit for the course.

DBU not only offers quality education, but also helps a student mature socially, spiritually, physically and intellectually.”

Yet, you may have a student who needs a different type of transition into school, and community college could be the answer for him or her.

Seek out the colleges that offer what your son or daughter is looking for in academics, size, activities, religious affiliations and campus life.

“The cost of higher education is continually increasing and taking courses through local community colleges will often times save students a great deal of money,” offers Ms. Chandler. “A number of basic courses can be taken at local

community colleges at a fraction of the cost of senior colleges.”

However, students should always be certain that their basic courses will transfer to the four-year college of their choice.

“Most four-year universities limit the number of transferable credit hours that they will accept from a community college,” Ms. Evans advises. “They do not, however, limit the number of transfer hours accepted from another four year university.”

Many schools, such as SFA, have created an equivalency guide for Texas community colleges so students can see if their courses will transfer or not.

HOW WILL YOU PAY?

With the right planning, a college education is within reach for everyone, however, there are many factors to consider when laying out the costs for college. Will your child attend a state school, public or private? Will he or she live at home, in an apartment or on campus? Include consideration of costs for tuition, books, transportation, and

room and board.

A good resource to help get started on researching costs and financial aid opportunities is www.collegefortexans.com, a resource provided by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. According to this site, there are many different types of financial aid available to students and their families. Some are based on academics; others might be tied to the family's ability to borrow, as well as many other options.

Grants. A grant, whether it's state, federal, private, corporate or institutional, is financial aid that does not have to be repaid. These are usually awarded on the basis of financial need. Some grants require the students to maintain a certain grade point average or take certain courses. A list of grants available to students at Texas universities is available on www.collegefortexans.com.

Loans. This type of financial aid must be repaid. However, there are many different types of loans, and even repayment assistance programs for certain career choices.

Work study. Students who qualify for financial aid are sometimes awarded work-study jobs. These positions, usually on campus, are offered to students to help pay for tuition or other college costs.

When I went back to school as an adult, I had a specific degree in mind and a goal to achieve. The first time I was in college it was more for my parents.

Scholarships. There are hundreds of scholarships available to students, the trick is doing the research and finding the ones that match your child. One source available is online, www.fastweb.com, the nation's largest source of local, national and college-specific scholarships.

In your scholarship search, consider the school your child will be attending. Many colleges have their own scholarship



Back to school gear from the Apple Store (top) and Aéropostale (below) at The Shops at Willow Bend
photos by Chris Fritchie

programs. For example, at DBU, there are general scholarships as well as those for music, education and other programs. At SMU (where 77.5 percent of first-year students receive financial assistance) there's even a scholarship for outstanding Dallas-area community college students.

Of course, each scholarship has specific eligibility requirements, whether it's based on academics, specific talents or financial need. Be sure to have your son or daughter research all of the options. You never know what might be available.

ADULT EDUCATION

As the kids get older, more and more parents are discovering that they would like to return to school. Some want to further their career, adding a degree or new certification to their resume. Others may choose to switch careers and try something new.

"I decided to go back to school as an adult because when I was in college the first time, it was more for my parents and fulfilling their desire for me to get an education and prepare me for the workforce," says Cherie Layton, who returned to school to pursue a second career. "When I went back to school as an adult, I had a specific degree in mind and a goal to achieve. I also saw several of the older women at my husband's company really struggle with the fact that they had raised their children and helped their husbands achieve career goals. Now, what do I do with me? I never wanted to have to worry about finding something for me to do."

While Ms. Layton was returning to school herself, she was helping to prepare her teenage daughter to enter the college world.

"I actually found it very beneficial to be attending school while preparing her for college because I found that a lot of things had changed since I was there 20 years ago," she admits. "The information age is so much more advanced. I saw that

she was going to have to have her own computer to succeed. Becoming familiar with new teaching methods helped me coach her to make the right decisions as far as what classes she would be best suited for."

When Ms. Layton returned to school, she decided to go the traditional classroom route. However, many adults are choosing to take online courses, allowing them the freedom to learn from anywhere at anytime.

Jennifer Smolka, who received her

Western Governors University (WGU), an accredited, non-profit, online university. Like Ms. Smolka, students have the flexibility to achieve educational goals and dreams while experiencing real life activities and events.

"These students have demands on their lives beyond what the traditional college student of 18-22 years old has," she explains. "Our students have active families with children and grandchildren of all ages, they have jobs and careers that are demanding and often require them to travel or work odd hours. Additionally, so many of our students are active volunteers at their children's schools and within their communities."

Although online learning is more flexible, it should by no means be considered "easier" than a traditional class. Students are also not limited to lectures and tests; online learning offers many resources such as video, audio, animations, discussion boards, online learning communities and more.

"While it is definitely more flexible, students have to remember to schedule their time," Ms. Smolka advises. Online students excel when they find a set schedule to work on class work. It could be 4 a.m. or 4 p.m., but set a specific time. Additionally, for many online learners, the family becomes a very important support network. They literally watch you accomplish your goals."

THE FUTURE AHEAD

Whether you're an adult wanting to return to school, or a parent getting your child ready for the college experience, it's never too early to start planning. For the best chance of success, start preparing long before it's time to apply, create a checklist and follow your timeline. The better prepared you are, the easier it will be for your child (or yourself) to accomplish goals, get into college and get on with those dreams.

Amanda VanCura is a freelance writer living in Plano.

Adult Education & Online Programs

DALLAS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY
www.dbu.edu (Dallas and Frisco Locations)

LETOURNEAU UNIVERSITY
www.letu.edu (Dallas)

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
www.unt.edu (Denton)

COLLIN COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT
www.ccccd.edu

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS
www.utdallas.edu (Richardson)

SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY
www.smu.edu (Dallas, Plano)

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
www.twu.edu (Denton, Dallas)

WESTERN GOVERNOR'S UNIVERSITY
www.wgu.edu (online university)

doctorate from the University of North Texas, was able to mix traditional coursework with online courses.

"At the time, I had three children under the age of five...I was able to limit my time away from my family. This allowed me to get my doctorate and still be a mom," she said. "What more could I ask? During this time I was also able to teach many masters level courses for UNT. I could do it during naptime, early in the morning or late in the evening. The freedom of my students to be able to learn, was my freedom to be able to teach."

Ms. Smolka believes in online learning so much that she became the Masters of Education Program Coordinator for