

## Area Advisers See Trends in College-Bound Students' Attitudes

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Knight Ridder Tribune Business News

Jun 18, 2003. pg. 1

Jun. 18--With a slumping economy, recent war resolution and new college programs, prospects for this year's crop of high school graduates may be different from what one might think.

Peninsula high school principals and academic counselors say some college-bound seniors are having to scale back their expectations, while low-income Peninsula students and scholarship students are actually finding more options in higher education.

And while high tech is no longer the sought-after sector among students, business is heating up as a college major.

Here's a list of trends local counselors are seeing:

- Scaled-back expectations. With a sour economy hitting family budgets, a number of middle-class graduates find they can't afford their private, out-of-state dream school, even if they've been accepted. Instead, they're staying in California and going public.

Consider the savings. Carmel High School Principal Karl Pallastrini said one student was accepted to Northwestern University outside Chicago -- which costs \$36,000 a year, including room and board -- but hung it up in favor of the University of California at Santa Barbara, which costs about \$19,000 a year.

"Students are reconsidering their options," said Pallastrini, who estimates that 15 percent of his private-school candidates are going public. "They're clearly not going to the schools they wanted to go to."

For some students, California was always the economic choice. "Everyone is staying in California, because it's cheaper," said Nick Cunningham, a Monterey High grad who will attend UC-Santa Barbara this fall on a partial track scholarship.

- Community colleges' rising appeal. With the economy in mind, more students -- even middle-class ones -- are considering two-year colleges such as Monterey Peninsula College or Hartnell.

Those students targeting a four-year institution often enroll in community colleges that act as "feeders." One popular feeder is Cuesta College in San Luis Obispo, which sends many of its grads to Cal Poly. Another is Fresno City College, which sends students to Fresno State.

- Business degrees are heating up. Forget Enron and WorldCom or the recent layoffs in the financial sector. Students still see business as a meal ticket.

"Students are aware of how difficult it is financially, so more students tend to be majoring in business," said Monterey High Assistant Principal Judy O'Mara. She estimated its popularity has grown by about 20 percent in the last few years -- above professions such as medicine and law. "It's an area where you're more likely to be successful in a fewer number of years."

Seaside High counselors say it's a popular major for college-bound Latino students.

"They want a concrete job in four years with real money, so they can help their families," said Assistant Principal Bill Murphy.

- Liberal arts increasing. Business may be booming, but so are the liberal arts, said counselors at Seaside High School.

"Five years ago, most students said, 'I'm going to be a computer person,'" said counselor Patrick Dowd. "Now I'm hearing less of that. I'm hearing a broader range of interests, which is thrilling." Murphy added: "They seem to be less focused on money."

- Military interest is constant. Despite the patriotism that even students showed after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and the run-up to the Iraqi war, counselors say they've seen no new interest in joining the armed forces. This spring, at least one military recruiter said he has seen no real change, either.

- Scholarships and outreach programs abound. Despite the economy, some school officials say financial aid and college guidance have grown.

Carmel's Pallastrini said a number of private schools, such as the University of Southern California, have snagged 10 percent more Carmel grads than usual this year through scholarships. Seaside High has seen the number of its University of California candidates soar in recent years. Thanks to a 3-year-old college outreach program, the school is sending 23 graduates to UC campuses this fall, up from eight in 1999.

"Many of those are students who wouldn't have gone (to college) at all," said Jacqui Dominguez, a UC "college advocate" for students at Seaside and other local high schools. How long that will last is unclear. Dominguez said the program could be cut from the state budget.

"If it's cut, it will have a negative impact," said Murphy, "because things have really improved here in the last five years."