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Students prepare for outside review

MAGNET PROGRAM: Foothill Technology High ninth-grader projects will get 'authentic assessment.'

By Kathleen Wilson
Ventura County Star writer
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Photo by Hide Terada

Fourteen-year-old Taryn Wieser looked into the future and didn't like everything she saw.

Working 21/2 hours a day for two weeks, Taryn scoured the Internet for information on how scientists had mapped the human genome, which contains the basic operating instructions for life. She found there were benefits -- such as the promise of curing deadly diseases -- but also risks, such as the temptation to engineer perfect human beings.

Then she put it together in a Power Point presentation complete with a video clip from the science fiction thriller "Gattaca" and an illustration of moving strands of DNA.

The ninth-grader at Foothill Technology High School had plenty of company in her exploration of the information age.

Every ninth-grader at the new magnet school in Ventura was assigned the task of researching online the risks and benefits of some aspect of advances in genetic and digital technology. The 270 students prepared presentations that will be evaluated by business people and educators beginning tonight at the school. The presentations will extend over the next couple weeks.

Foothill teacher Rich Geib said the project is an example of

ON DECK: Oak View resident Taryn Wieser, a ninth-grader at Foothill Technology High School, looks through index cards before her presentation on the human genome to her English class. Ninth-graders at the new magnet school had to research the risks and benefits of some aspect of advances in genetic and digital technology.

JANUARY EVENTS

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

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- [Fillmore](#)
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- [Santa Paula](#)
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the type of education the new school was designed to offer.

The curriculum combines modern technology with "authentic assessment" in which professionals in various fields give students feedback on their work.

Geib said the freshmen researched topics in health care, economics and the mass media, determining how technological trends will change life in Ventura. In all, they worked for seven weeks on the projects that were graded by their teachers, he said.

As his students made their presentations to fellow students last week, Geib critiqued them. Michael Hipskind won high marks for theatrics as he smashed a soda can against his forehead to show what some students may do when they're taken off Ritalin. Jake Smith, representing the opposite side of the Ritalin debate, got points for his calm delivery.

"Don't assume that people know what you're talking about," Geib told another student. "Take it from the big story down to the small story."

The project mimics what students could expect to find in a business environment, from the suits they wear for their presentations to the high-tech graphics. But Michael Hipskind said drama goes a long way, too.

"I thought I had to make my point," he said.

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