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Westlake Academy grads share their college lives

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WESTLAKE -- All decked out in college jerseys, Westlake Academy's second graduating class returned to the high school Jan. 6 to receive their International Baccalaureate diplomas and mentor current students during a round table discussion, with many telling them "There is life after IB."

The rigorous IB program fosters global thinking and offers an internationally recognized diploma, which is in addition to the diploma students receive in June each year after completing requirements established by the Texas Education Agency.

With the first semester of college under their belt, the graduates shared stories about college life and talked about how much easier classes seem compared to their college peers.

"The IB program does help," said Khalil Pillai, freshman at DePaul University in Chicago. "It seems like a pain, but it helps with writing ... I can spit out a paper like a Xerox machine. I wrote 30 in 10 weeks."

Like Pillai, other graduates also said they can write college papers easily after going through the IB program and said they have more free time in college than they did during high school.

Chuckles were frequent during some of the college advice given, which included "listen in class," "don't cram, it doesn't work," and "call your parents, they probably love you."

Joelle Jung, freshman at the University of Texas at Austin, told the high schoolers to be on time with their college work.

"You're not going to be able to talk your teacher into an extension," Jung said. "There's 400 students in a class."

Chad Crawford, freshman at the University of Tulsa, disagreed.

"I go to a small college, so we do get extensions," Crawford said. "So that's my advice."

Tom Brymer, town manager and superintendent of Westlake Academy, said the great thing about having a round table discussion is it gives current students a first hand look at what they can achieve.

"We spend a lot of time casting a vision for these students," Brymer said. "What's really neat about this, is they see it in action ... and then think, 'I can do this.'"

Before the event, Grapevine resident Helen Mraz said her granddaughter, Taylor Noel Brown, shared with her family on numerous occasions about what a smooth transition it was going from high school to Furman University, in Greenville, S.C.

"Adjusting to college wasn't hard for her at all," Mraz said.

Brown said the "vigorous workload" at Westlake Academy made it easier for her during her first semester of college.

"I felt prepared," Brown said. "It definitely gave me a big leg up compared to some of the other kids."

Bill Brown, Taylor's dad, said he appreciates that the school focuses on critical thinking and encourages interaction with other students, noting because of that, his daughter now has a "tremendous amount of confidence."

Stacy Stoyanoff, diploma coordinator for the academy, said the class of 2011 not only achieved the IB diploma but achieved it at a very high level, surpassing the world average pass rate in almost every area of the exam.

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