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OU hosts 'scholarship boot camp' for local high school students, parents

A group of high school students and their parents recently visited Oakland University for a workshop focused on college planning and helping families successfully navigate financial aspects of higher education.

The Michigan Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness (MI GEAR UP) Scholarship Boot Camp brought 12th-grade students from Oak Park High School, Pontiac High School and International Technology Academy to campus, where they took part in a workshop led by OU alumna and Detroit native Gwen Thomas.

Thomas, an education advocate and author of the book *The Parent's Smart Guide to Sending Your Kids to College Without Going Broke*, covered a variety of topics including: How to go to college for free; How to get scholarships, grants, and fellowships; What colleges are looking for in students; and educational global competitiveness.

"We want to think a little smarter and a little differently about educating our young people and our parents about college debt," Thomas said. "We want to encourage them to get a return on their college education – to build wealth, not debt. The strategy behind that is there are many opportunities available for young people to apply for scholarships."

Following the workshop, the group went to a campus computer lab, where students worked on resumes and personal essays. The event was sponsored by Pre-College Programs, which coordinates the MI GEAR UP initiative at Oakland University. GEAR UP offers a variety of academic and social services to high school students in the Oak Park and Pontiac school districts. Students receive academic and social programming from seventh grade through their freshman year of college.

"It has been a privilege to support our GEAR UP students for the last six years," said Tiffany Elliott, assistant director of Pre-College Programs. "My team and I pride ourselves on facilitating college readiness programs such as SAT preparation, college visitations, and financial aid awareness. Over these past couple of years, our programming has been designed to equip them with the knowledge they need in order to find their best college fit and become successful college students."

Thomas added, "I'm very proud to see that Oakland University is involved in the GEAR UP program. It gives young people a hand up; it gives them some direction. Oftentimes, these are the students who are the first in their families to have a journey into higher education."



Author and OU alumna Gwen Thomas led a workshop to teach high school students and their parents about planning for and financing college. (Annistique Photography)



After the workshop, students wrote personal essays and resumes in a campus computer lab. (Annistique Photography)

Learn more about OU Pre-College Programs at oakland.edu/precollege.