

COLONIE

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Spotlight

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Career program gives students hands-on health experience

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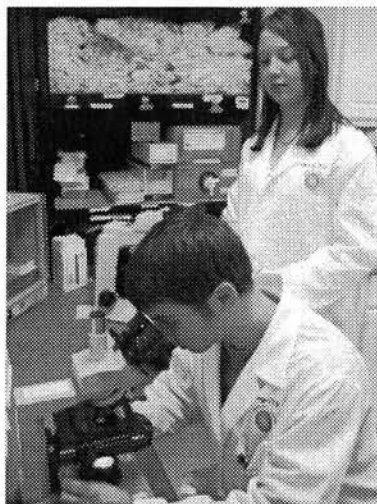
It's 10 a.m., Wednesday, Dec. 13.

While their fellow students mull over the daily course load of their classes at area high schools, four high school seniors are putting their semen density gradient washing techniques to the test.

They are preparing a mock sample for in vitro fertilization at Albany IVF Fertility and Gynecology on Northern Boulevard.

The students are enrolled in the New Visions health careers program through the Capital Region Career and Technical School. The course is a one-year vocational-technical program that offers college-bound seniors the opportunity to shadow professionals in a multitude of fields. Students can get a taste of various professions, from law and government to journalism.

The New Visions program is based at Ellis Hospital.



High school students Wade Lupe, left, and Kelly Dunnigan work at Albany IVF. *Graham Parker/Spotlight*

It's tough, and the workload is more to the tune of college course work. But the students are confident that by the time they graduate this summer, they will be on the track to a job they love, not to mention having some college credits to boot.

"I've always been interested in

life science. I'm still looking (at various fields), but I know I think becoming a physician's assistant seems good. You can go into any field (of medicine) that you're interested in," said Wade Lupe, 17, a senior at Niskayuna High School.

Many students in high school don't take courses that matter to them, Lupe said. Rather they take what they are told they need to fulfill their course load. Participating in New Visions gives the students an opportunity to try the fields out, both hands-on and through intensive research.

Lupe, Kelly Dunnigan, 17, a senior at South Colonie and two seniors from Duanesburg, spend time in circulation at Ellis Hospital. They shadow doctors, talk about issues in the medical field and discuss new medical techniques as well as the basics.

It's basically a crash course in medicine, and over the past two days, beginning Tuesday, Dec. 12, the students have been learning the ropes of in vitro fertilization.

"This is the first experience with high school students," said Gwen Testo, clinical manager at Albany IVF. Previously the staff at IVF had worked with college students enrolled in medical programs.

These high school students are asking the right questions and have no problem grasping the basic science behind fertility treatments, Testo said.

The program is good, Testo said, because it can give them the opportunity to get behind the scenes of various medical professions.

"The more exposure they get, the better they will be able to make a decision about their future careers," she said.

The workload is intense, said Dunnigan and Lupe. At the end of their shadowing at Albany IVF, they are expected to write a 10-page paper. That doesn't include the reading and in-house tests at the facility. To make it fun, Testo has prepared a "Jeopardy!"-style reproduction exam.

The students arrive at Ellis

Hospital three days a week, where they shadow staff in three rotations, from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. They attend honors courses at the vo-tech school to fulfill the rest of the program requirements.

Many of the students have already met state Regents and high school graduation requirements. The courses they take through New Vision earn them college credits through Russell Sage.

Writing 30 pages a week on their weekly adventures in education isn't uncommon, said Dunnigan. But at least they are about topics and a field of study they are interested in, even if semen density gradient washing may not exactly be their bag.

"I knew I wanted to be a doctor or a pharmacist in the medical field," said Dunnigan. "By doing this, we get to see what the medical field is all about, and it sets you apart."

Albany IVF is one of 30 rotations New Vision students will participate in this year. Their other rotations deal with radiology, neurology, emergency room, pharmacy and administrative work.