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Bridges Project: Learning curve – what's the best education direction to take?

By Sue Goldberg and Joleen Montoya Dye, For The Taos News
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We hope the start of the school year has begun on a good note for everyone. It's always a big transition to go from summertime to being back in school, but by now you've probably settled into a rhythm. Some

of you have college on your minds and that's exactly what we're going to address in this month's column.

We tend to use the term college loosely. It can mean going to a community college for one year to achieve a certificate in a specific trade or vocation, or for two years to work toward an associate degree. Without a doubt, it is also about attending a four-year school to earn a bachelor's degree.

Figuring out which of these directions to take can be the beginning of your exploration. You can also give thought to how close or far you want to be from home, the types of climates you like and whether you'd prefer to be in or near a big city, or a more rural area.

You can reflect on how you learn best, either in a small, medium or large setting. Some people are more comfortable with the idea of being in high school-sized classes while others are inspired by sitting in a lecture hall with hundreds of other students.

College campuses have so much to offer. Something to consider is the kind of opportunities you're looking for regarding groups and clubs, or

doing community service. You can also think about sports and whether you might want to play competitively – just for fun and exercise – or perhaps not at all.

A lot of students worry about not knowing what to major in, but you can figure that out as you go. One of the best things about being in college is that it's a chance to branch out — and you may find yourself being drawn to something that might come as a surprise to you now.

Visiting college campuses is a great idea if you can do it. You can look at websites, read about colleges in books and hear about them from people you know — but nothing compares to checking out schools for yourself to sense whether you would feel at home there.

Paying for college is an important piece of the puzzle because it's more expensive now than it's ever been. Bridges' college counselors work with people throughout their application process so that when it comes down to deciding which school to attend, they have solid options that will be good financial fits for their families. There's no doubt that college can be costly, but it's an investment in your potential and in the rest of your life.

Bridges was founded in 1997 to help people of all ages get to college, especially those who are from the first generation in their families to seek out higher education. In 19 years, we have worked with more than 2,500 individuals.

We believe there's no cookie-cutter approach because each person's circumstances are unique. That's why we sit down together and move along through each step of the process until all goals have been reached.

If you are interested in going to college, please call our office to set up an appointment. Our services are free and open to people of all ages.

Call (575) 758-5074 or go to **bridgesproject.org** for more information.

Goldberg and Dye are Bridges co-directors and college counselors.