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14-year-old 'genius' becomes Spartan

By [BEN LANDES](#)

The State News

Starting college can be scary.

It can be tough for any 18-year-old to suddenly leave home and be on their own. But what happens when someone who should be starting high school this fall, is actually starting college?

According to admissions officials, Taraz Buck, at 14, is the youngest full-time student ever to attend MSU, and already has a full semester of college credit.

"It doesn't really affect me that much - its happened a lot before," Taraz, an Okemos resident, said about his exceptional case. "There aren't very many things that I get excited about, but what I'm planning on doing is computer science and engineering. Probably mostly computer science but I want to go for a biomedical engineering option, too."

His mother, Nahzy Buck, knew early on her son was different.

When he was 15-months-old, Taraz spent a week secretly unscrewing a table's legs with his fingers, making it collapse.

"It takes a lot, that usually a 15-month-old would not follow such planning and doing it on daily basis and being able to keep it secret," she said.

He also was disappointed with day care, his mother said. He found it boring and complained they didn't pay attention to him unless his parents were present.

"So he showed to me that he was aware much more than he was supposed to be at that age," Nahzy said. "He had this mind for mechanical things, and thinking and arguing with you like a grown up - as a little child, those are the things I found so exceptional about him."

The first time Taraz was called a genius was in Ottawa, Canada, while he was being placed in a Montessori school for the gifted.

"He was a kindergartner - that's the first time I heard the term," his father Christopher Buck said. "The second time was in fourth grade and then with the Stanford achievement test in fifth grade, that's when the decision came to skip him a grade."

Taraz scored a cumulative 99.9 percentile on the Stanford achievement test at a private school in



NICK SHORT • The State News

Incoming freshman Taraz Buck, 14, will be the youngest student to attend MSU. Buck plans to study computer science.

Decatur, Ill.

Taraz would follow with similar successes as he skipped sixth, eighth and 12th grades.

He began as a sophomore at Okemos High School and spent only two years there.

"We don't have very many such students," said Barbara Steidle, assistant provost for undergraduate education and academic services. "In the past, they have been exceptional students who started out, and basically when they come in at that age, they are expected to do the same kinds of things as any other student does."

Sometimes additional emotional and support advising is required, especially since Taraz will not be living in the residence halls, she said.

"I think that really becomes a question for the student himself. There are some students who are very social and very emotionally mature," Steidle said. "There are other students who focus on their school work and don't seem to feel a need for a whole lot of other assistance, so it's highly individual just as it would be for any other student. The only difference is that this person is younger."

Taraz attended several college classes last year and worked for two semesters under biochemistry and molecular biology Associate Professor David Arnosti's tutelage.

"He's very interested and very curious, doesn't know a lot about lab science, but he's learning fast - I think he'll do fine," Arnosti said.

"He has the kind of mind that can discover something down the road, and my hope is that discovery will somehow help humanity. I don't know if it will be technical or medical, but he just has that kind of mind," his father said.

His mother also has similar hopes and dreams for his future.

"My most important hope about him is that whatever he does, he will do it in an excellent way, and if that turns into serving human kind, that's good. No achievement, at least in my book, is achievement if you do not benefit humanity because that is why you have come to this world," she said.

"I want him to shine, learn a lot and use that to serve. That's all I'm asking for, and I think he knows that's his purpose and it's what he wants to do. So I hope it will go in that direction in all aspects and levels of his life, with his family and his community."

Taraz was first accepted to Iowa State University, but chose MSU because his parents live near East Lansing. MSU has provided him with a four-year scholarship.

"I'm sure he's looking forward to this more and more," Buck's father said. "But one thing I'm sure about, by having been at MSU for over a year now and having a semesters worth of credits - he's prepared."

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