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Teenage genius

18-year-old senior to graduate from MSU, pursue doctorate

By [HOLLY KLAFT](#)

The State News

While most 18-year-olds are preparing to leave their high schools to start new lives as undergraduates, Taraz Buck will be leaving MSU to begin working on his doctorate.

Buck was one of the youngest full-time students to enroll at MSU at age 14. The computer science senior will begin working on his doctorate degree in computational biology in the fall, which is a joint program between the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University.

He said he chose the program because of his interest in both computer and natural sciences.

"I went into computer science because I'm good at it and I liked it," Buck said. "And I put the two fields together to make the best use of my abilities."

He said he would like to use his knowledge to help others and hopes his research can have medical applications.

Buck started working at an MSU biochemistry laboratory when he was about 12 years old, said Christopher Buck, Taraz's father.

"I have absolute confidence that he can make a discovery for science," Christopher Buck said.

In addition to his work in two biochemistry labs, Buck has done research at the Media Interface and Network Design Lab, or MIND, located in the Communication Arts and Sciences Building.

"He's obviously a smart kid and committed to learning," said Corey Bohil, manager of the MIND lab. "But it's more than intelligence, it's his attitude, too. He's a model student and takes his studies seriously."

The family first realized Buck was more exceptional than they anticipated when he was enrolling in a Montessori school for the gifted in Ottawa, Canada.

"The principal came to us and said, 'Mr. and Mrs. Buck, I believe you have a genius on your hands,'" Christopher Buck said.

Teachers told the Buck family he was a genius again in fifth grade after administering a Stanford



[MIKE ITCHUE](#) • The State News

Computer science senior Taraz Buck will graduate in May at age 18 after entering MSU at 14. Buck will begin a joint university doctoral program in computational biology at the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University in August.

Achievement Test. Buck scored in the 99.9 percentile, and the score resulted in the decision for him to skip sixth grade. Buck later skipped the eighth and 12th grades.

His mother, Nahzy Buck, said because her son skipped 12th grade, he never technically graduated high school, but said she doesn't think it will have an effect on him in the long run.

Taraz Buck said he doesn't think he missed out on any high school experiences because he graduated early.

"I don't regret not going to high school for four years; it was appropriate for me," Buck said. "I think people too often assume there's a social risk when you skip grades or do something early on."

Buck said people should be open to the idea of educating their children faster.

"The goal shouldn't be to skip grades, but to realize a child's capacity to learn and not to underestimate that," he said.

He said he considers his parents role models and inspirations.

"They taught me a lot of my principles and that I must excel and be a model for other people," he said.


The Buck family plans to move near the University of Pittsburgh campus to be with Buck and his brother, Takur, who enrolled at the university to study psychiatry.

"It's turning out to be advantageous for everyone," said Taraz Buck of his family's move.

He added that his studies have helped shape his life.

"Education is important in the sense that it leads you on to what you're doing in your life," Buck said. "Every action taken is based on the knowledge you've acquired."

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