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Starting next school year, Norfolk High is planning career academies to help match students with their passions.

What do you want to be when you grow up?



JAKE WRAGGE/DAILY NEWS

JAY ARNOLD (far right), electronics and welding instructor, along with Jeff Hoffman, career academy coordinator for the Norfolk Public Schools, stand with students and watch a plasma cutter cut a sheet of metal in the metal shop at the Norfolk High School.

Career academies will tailor courses to students' interests

By ERIN BELL

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Norfolk High School plans to roll out the first set of its career academies next fall.

Jeff Hoffman has been hired as its first-ever career academy coordinator to aid in the effort.

The academies concentrate on career education, with each focusing on a specific area within an industry.

The Nebraska Department of Education has designated six career cluster areas — agriculture, food and natural resources; communication and information systems; skilled and technical sciences; health sciences; human sciences and education; and business, marketing and management.

Schools have flexibility in choosing the academies offered within each cluster.

The career academies Norfolk High has selected are automotive, agricul-



JAKE WRAGGE/DAILY NEWS

JASON GARCIA, a junior at Norfolk High School, practices his skills during welding class at the high school. It's the kind of class that can be part of career academies next school year at Norfolk.

ture, construction, drafting and health sciences.

Hoffman's job is to make sure they're

ready come next school year, which means making sure curriculum is sequenced correctly and meeting with advisory committees for each course.

The advisory boards consist of industry representatives, who bring knowledge of standards within their respective fields, he said. So, for example, Hoffman said the drafting advisory board includes Nucor representatives.

"(The representatives) will be crucial for understanding what the knowledge and the skills are that our students will need," Hoffman said.

Hoffman, who started his new role last month, is a Norfolk High graduate with extensive experience in higher education.

His 18-plus years working with colleges appealed to Jake Luhr, Norfolk High principal, during the hiring process.

Hoffman's most recent role was as

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the department chairman of physical education and human performance at Hastings College.

"College is nothing new to him, so he has a lot of experience in that area," Luhr said.

While Hoffman knows what it takes to be prepared for college, he also knows that a four-year degree isn't for everyone.

"I've seen students come through college and then totally not do anything in that area," Hoffman said.

The career academies are designed to allow students to explore various career options so they can graduate with skills they need, knowing whether they should pursue a two-year degree or a four-year degree or enter the workforce right away.

"Not every kid is going to go to a four-year university, so part of it is educating them about the futures they may have and what things they may have a passion for so that they can be productive, if not in our community, in whatever community they decide to live in," Luhr said.

Norfolk High has many of the classes that are going to be used in the academies already in place. For example, the school nurse offers a certified nurse's assistant course, which has proven popular.

The point of the academies is to provide a sequence of courses — including an introductory level course and a capstone course — that will allow students interested in a certain area to gain pertinent skills and

knowledge in a organized way.

Students must apply to be a part of the academies. Once enrolled, they must participate in a student organization, such as FFA or SkillsUSA. There's also an emphasis on practical experience, such as job shadowing, field trips to local businesses and internships.

Part of what Hoffman will be working on before the academies are introduced is marketing them so that students and parents know what's available and what each academy entails.

The classes within the academies are offered as electives, so students who don't want to commit to an academy also have the opportunity to participate in individual classes.

For the 2016-17 school year,

Norfolk High is looking at possibly introducing a business academy — which would include accounting and finance, marketing management, and hospitality and tourism as well as food and nutrition, early childhood education, welding and information technology.

"I just think it's a tremendous opportunity for our public schools, for our community and our community businesses, and our local community college, Northeast," Luhr said. "It's kind of a perfect storm. A lot of us are all at the table and we're all speaking the same language and it's pretty exciting what great educational opportunities we're going to be able to provide for our kids."