

Dual Enrollment: Postsecondary/Secondary Partnerships to Prepare Students

By Katherine L. Hughes

The last decade has seen an explosion of interest in dual enrollment. In dual enrollment, high school students are permitted to take college courses and, if they pass them, earn college credit. Sometimes, as in the case of dual credit, students earn both high school and college credit for the same course.

In U.S. Department of Education surveys in which high school and postsecondary institutions were asked about their participation in dual enrollment during the 2002–2003 school year, three-quarters of high schools reported that they had students taking college courses. Fifty-seven percent of the college sample reported that they had high school students taking their courses; almost all of the public two-year colleges (98%) reported participating. Over the course of that school year, more than 800,000 high school students nationwide enrolled in a college-credit course.

These surveys did not measure growth of participation, but several states that track their own students have reported increasing numbers of dually enrolled students. In fact, some states have passed new policies in recent years that promote dual enrollment. For example, in Texas all high school students must now be given the option to earn at least 12 college credits through any combination of Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual credit,

or articulated postsecondary courses. In neighboring New Mexico, a new high school graduation requirement is in effect, starting with last fall's ninth graders, mandating that all students take at least one AP, dual credit, or distance education (online) course.

In contrast to AP and IB programs and articulated courses, in which students take high school courses that have rigorous, college-level content, in dual enrollment students take actual college courses. Another difference is in how students earn credit. In AP and IB programs, what students achieve throughout the duration of a particular course has no bearing on earning college credit. Instead, whether or not they earn college credit is dependent on their score on a single, end-of-course examination and whether the college they enter will give credit for that particular score. In dual enrollment, students complete whatever assessments would normally be completed as part of the college course, and they are given a final grade on a college transcript.

Dual enrollment thus requires the engagement of college faculty with high school personnel and their students. What are some of the ways in which college faculty might find themselves interacting with high school teachers and students? And what are some of the challenges and potential benefits of these relationships? The answers to these questions

depend on the structural features of particular programs.

In some cases, high school students simply enroll in college courses, meeting whatever eligibility criteria or prerequisites are mandated by the state or district or college (usually such criteria are set locally, but a handful of states impose statewide regulations). In these cases, college faculty may or may not even be aware that they have high school students in their classes. Ideally, their high school counselor or dual enrollment coordinator will have provided the students with some kind of orientation to collegelike conduct so that they will be less likely to stand out because of immature behavior. Still, it can be beneficial for college faculty to know who the high school students are so that if one or more of them show signs of poor performance, communication can be made with the high school to elicit extra support or to provide counseling about whether a class should be dropped. The purpose here is to not let students fail the first college courses they attempt.

Some dual enrollment programs are more structured in that certain courses are scheduled or set aside specifically for high school students, so that they are not mixed in with regularly matriculated college students. In these cases, a college faculty member is recruited to teach a class made up only of high school students. Research that my colleagues and I have conducted has found

that some faculty eagerly take this job on, and others avoid it. Usually the decision about who serves as instructor for such a course is made by the department chair in a given college discipline, taking seniority into consideration.

Certainly faculty who don't wish to teach a group of high school students and who say that they chose college-level teaching so as to steer clear of younger students shouldn't be made to teach dual enrollment classes. It's a much better strategy in any case to recruit a college instructor who has perhaps had some experience teaching in high school in the past and who is motivated to be involved with this particular population. Experience with younger students and enthusiasm for the assignment may bear on teaching approaches. Although dual enrollment courses should deliver the same rigorous college content using the same syllabus, texts, and assessments as other college courses, it's allowable for the instructor to consider using pedagogical strategies that may be better at engaging high school students in their first college courses. Instructors may also provide extra support or scaffolding for the students, or they may refer them to such help elsewhere.

Another common format for the delivery of dual enrollment courses is to schedule them on the high school campus and have them taught by high school teachers who are qualified to serve as college adjuncts. As efforts to expand participation in dual enrollment have increased, this has become a popular model because it removes the challenge of transporting high school students to colleges. Yet some questions have arisen as to how classes taught at high schools by high school teachers can be considered genuine college courses. Again, no matter where or by whom they are

delivered, dual enrollment courses must teach the identical content as their college campus-based, college faculty-taught counterparts.

In this latter format, college instructors may be asked to work with and oversee the high school teachers hired as college adjuncts. These teachers need to know which texts to use, how to submit grades, and other logistics. More important, the teachers might well need input about college standards and expectations. Such a dialogue between instructors from the two education sectors may result not only in higher quality college courses for dual enrollment students but also in the development of a more college-like atmosphere and increased rigor throughout the high schools.

Finally, those college faculty and others who remain skeptical of the value of allowing high school students access to college should consider the evidence. Admittedly, there has not been a great deal of rigorous research on the impact of dual enrollment participation. Still, studies that my colleagues and I have conducted comparing dual enrollment participants with nonparticipants in two states, and controlling for observable student and school characteristics, have found a wealth of benefits for participants. Briefly, dual enrollment was positively related to students' likelihood of earning a high school diploma, to college enrollment, to persistence in college, and to higher postsecondary grade-point averages. And, while much dual enrollment occurs through community colleges, participating students in our studies who went on to attend college once completing high school were more likely to enroll in a four-year institution, perhaps indicating that their early taste of college gave them the skills and confidence to raise their educational aspirations.

More research on how participation in dual enrollment may contribute to students' smoother secondary-to-postsecondary transitions is certainly needed. In the meantime, dual enrollment serves to encourage engagement among college faculty, collaborating high school teachers and staff, and motivated secondary students who are interested in higher education. Given our national problem with college persistence and completion, the fostering of such relationships can only be regarded as a positive step.

Resources

- Hughes, K.L., M.M. Karp, B. Fermin, and T. Bailey. 2005. *Pathways to college access and success*. Washington, DC: Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education.
- Karp, M.M., J.C. Calcagno, K.L. Hughes, D.W. Jeong, and T. Bailey. 2007. *The postsecondary achievement of participants in dual enrollment: An analysis of student outcomes in two states*. St. Paul: National Research Center for Career and Technical Education, University of Minnesota.
- Karp, M.M., and K.L. Hughes. 2008. Supporting college transitions through collaborative programming: A conceptual model for guiding policy. *Teachers College Record* 110: 838–866.

Note: All of these reports can be found on the Community College Research Center's website (<http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu>).

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