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ABSTRACT

This paper (a summary of a dissertation) defines school-based college-level learning as when a college approves of high school teachers as "adjuncts" and of courses taught in the high school as equivalent in content and rigor to the college courses taught on the sponsoring college campus. These courses are intended to result in simultaneous--both high school and college--credit to the student. This paper reports on the author's study, which aimed to answer the question: What is the extent and nature of school-based college-level learning sponsored by the State University of New York (SUNY) community colleges? The author applied both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in the collection of data for analysis within four sectors: community colleges, high schools, SUNY, and the New York State Education Department (NYSED). An addendum questionnaire was given to the 30 SUNY community college presidents and vice-presidents to obtain data from the 30 community colleges. Twenty-nine of these questionnaires were completed and analyzed. Among the findings are that the number of high school participants has more than doubled as the number of school-based course sections increased by 60% from 1998 to 1999. New York State's funding formula encourages school-based college-level learning because FTE aid is available to community colleges, even though little or no costs are borne by them. (NB)

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A Study of SUNY Community College Sponsorship of School-Based College-Level Learning in High School

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Introduction

As access to higher education increased in the 1970s with the expansion of community colleges, so did the demands to prepare high school students for college entry. With more and more students entering college rather than opting for a full-time job or entering the armed services, the need for quality programs and opportunities that would equip these students to make a successful transition from high school to college became apparent. Educators recognized the need to research new ways of facilitating the movement of students from secondary to post-secondary institutions during this time as costs for education were rising and economic resources became scarce (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973). Educational institutions responded by developing collaborative initiatives to provide for such a transition from school to college by forming linkages with other educational institutions at all levels. These early collaborations provided the affordable means for post-secondary institutions to communicate directly with secondary schools and to create opportunities to share resources with one another.

This study investigated one such school-college linkage in New York State which, while growing rapidly, raised important academic and financial questions. Specifically, this research examined the practices of community colleges of the State University of New York (SUNY) that are providing college credit courses deemed to be college-level, but are taught by high school teachers to high school students within the regular high school academic schedule [known as school-based college-level learning, Johnstone, forthcoming; Barnes, 2001].

School-Based College-Level Learning

The term school-based college level learning was first introduced to this author by Dr. D. Bruce Johnstone, Professor of Higher Education at the University at Buffalo during a "brown bag" gathering of *Learning Productivity* graduate students in U.B.'s Department of Educational Leadership and Policy. Here, Professor Johnstone introduced the concept of "school-based" as a form of college-level learning that takes place in high schools. School-based college level learning is defined in the Ph.D. dissertation: *College-level Learning in High School: A Study of SUNY Community College Sponsorship of "School-Based" College Credits in Participating High Schools (Barnes, 2001) as:*

> **School-based college-level learning is when a college approves of high school teachers as "adjuncts" and of courses taught in the high school as equivalent in content and rigor to the college courses taught on the sponsoring college campus.**

In essence, the school-based course can be a regularly taught course in any of the academic disciplines at the high school, of college-level equivalency to the sponsoring college or university course taught on campus. Such courses are intended to result in simultaneous credit to high school students, satisfying both secondary graduation and college credit requirements. The sponsoring college or university grants the credit on a transcript for the college course taught by the "approved" high school teacher "adjunct" at the high school.

School-based learning is also problematic, and controversy exists as to whether such courses are truly equivalent to the sponsoring college's courses in content and rigor (i.e. same in syllabi, tests, assignments, texts, grading) and whether teacher quality is adequate for that particular college-level course. With school-based learning, quality assurance is a concern: whether the learning (even limited to subject matter mastery) is genuinely college-level. Therefore a fundamental concern is that since school-based learning relies on high school teachers and courses given in the high school without external assessment for quality control, "leaving them open to the suspicion on the part of college and university faculty that courses in the high school environment taught by high school teachers cannot be counted upon to be legitimately college-level" (Johnstone, 1998).

A Research Agenda

In light of the rapid growth of SUNY community college school-based programs, the community colleges were selected as the primary focus for this study, instead of the four-year colleges and university centers. Although the fundamental issue in college-level learning in high school [CLLHS] is whether the learning is indeed college-level, this study attempted to answer a prior, more descriptive question: What is the extent and nature of school-based college-level learning sponsored by SUNY community colleges?

There are obvious reasons for colleges to sponsor school-based college-level learning. These include: (a) revenue generation [from FTE student headcounts, upon which base aid is given]; (b) minimal instructional costs to the community college because teaching is done in the high school by high school teachers who are usually paid by the school district; (c) ease of course registration; (d) college marketing advantages from enlisting students while they are still in high school; and, (e) stimulation of additional collaborations between the high school and community college. Finally, for the student, the opportunity exists to obtain and transfer school-based college credit; this is preferable to the more rigorous AP programs where the grade is based on a single examination.

In New York State, community colleges have been facing budgetary shortfalls and increasing revenue through such college-level courses offerings may be the beginning of a trend to expand existing markets to include high school attendees into the headcounts for FTE revenue. Such institutional behavior is contrary to the historical expansion of SUNY community colleges when "responding to economic growth" was the motivating factor. Meanwhile, rapid growth rates of school-based course offerings are generating revenues faster than quality assurance policies and procedures can be put in place.

A Review of the Literature on College-Level Learning

A review of the literature on college-level learning shows an abundance of new research by Johnstone and the University at Buffalo's Learning Productivity Network of Barba, Crooks, Cusker, Barnes and Del Genio. In Johnstone's 1998 "College-Level Learning in High School: Promises, Threats and Challenges", he states that "the promise of college-level learning lies in its potential to lessen the duplication between the high school and college curricula, to get the high school student more quickly into the context and expectations of collegiate learning...." This suggests that curriculum coordination is needed at both the secondary and college levels as school-based courses are developed. Such credit potential gives rise to college and school collaborations as competition among colleges increases and high school students respond along with parents to the possibilities to earn college credit and save money.

These practical outcomes are directly linked to Johnstone's earlier writing (as Chancellor of SUNY, 1988-1994), "Learning Productivity: A New Imperative for American Higher Education" (Johnstone, 1993). Here, Learning Productivity is defined as "more learning for the same costs or equal learning for less cost."

A major focus of this school-based college-level learning study is the increasing participation by community colleges with high schools. High school students simultaneously taking college-level courses for college credit while meeting the requirements for secondary school graduation is on the rise. Research by Crooks (1998) regarding state enhancement of college-level learning for high school students, points out that "college-level learning is growing in this country as state advocates of state reform favor college-level learning as a means to raise educational standards, increase academic rigor and expand student opportunities." For example, lawmakers in Minnesota, considered the most active state with respect to promoting CLLHS instituted a series of state enhancements for collegiate learning in the 1980s, based on the notion that colleges might force secondary schools to become more responsive to the needs of students and parents (Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor, March 1996).

The level of SUNY community college sponsorship in college-level learning was initially found using SUNY Systems Administration data provided as a result of an interview with the SUNY Director of Community Colleges. The "Part-time, First-time Undergraduate Credit Course Students by High School Status" report on SUNY community colleges, state-operated colleges, and university centers (1992-1997) was the source of the information. The preliminary research from these SUNY reports indicated large and increasing numbers of high school students concurrently enrolled at SUNY community colleges while in high school from 1992 to 1997.

Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were applied to collect data for analysis within these four sectors: community colleges; high schools; SUNY; and New York State Education Department [NYSED]. An "addendum" questionnaire was designed by this researcher to build upon quantitative data which was analyzed from a University at Buffalo Learning Productivity Network (U.B. LPN) questionnaire. The "addendum" questionnaire was given to SUNY's community college presidents and vice presidents to obtain data from the 30 SUNY community colleges. (Twenty-nine (29) of thirty (30) questionnaires were completed and analyzed). This questionnaire succeeded in acquiring quantitative data; however, it fell short in getting to the perceptions, attitudes, and support areas of the research. Consequently, four SUNY community college case studies were conducted along with their partnering high schools to identify the perceptions and attitudes that exist in the colleges and schools for school-based college-level learning. The college case study participants included: community college president, vice president for academic affairs, a member of the faculty senate and the faculty union. The high school participants included: principal, "adjunct" teachers, and teacher union representatives. And finally, interviews with staff of SUNY and NYSED were conducted and policy documents were examined and analyzed.

This research attempted to address the following questions:

- What is the extent of school-based learning participation in SUNY and administrations in community colleges?
- What are the policies and procedures for College-Level Learning in High Schools?
- What are the perceptions of school-based learning and related practices of college/school administration, faculty/teachers?

The variety of data sources, including documents, questionnaires, and case studies, served as a cross-check of the patterns and triangulate the findings. The goal was to produce a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the data from the community colleges questionnaire, combined with a qualitative analysis of the case studies of the four community colleges and the eight high schools involved with them.

Findings

The number of high school student participants more than doubled as the number of school-based course sections increased over 60% from 1998-1999. The rapid growth rates reveal a trend of increasing community college-level participation with high schools in the short time during which the research data were collected. Without question, the data show that school-based course offerings, particularly in General Education (Liberal Arts) and the technologies, continued to rise throughout SUNY. Logistically, the school-based form of college-level learning is a convenient way for individual colleges to make arrangements with a nearby school or school district to offer college-level courses. Thus, high school students can take college classes without leaving the familiarity of their surroundings, and the high school instructors are presumed to teach the equivalent of college-level classes in various subject areas.

In New York State, the funding formula encourages school-based college-level learning because FTE (full-time Equivalent) aid is available to all community colleges that enroll high school students in credit programs (using a formula of 1 FTE = $2,125 per student FTE revenue from the state to the college). This funding formula for state aid is the same for all community college students--including high school students. During the time of this study, the extent of SUNY community college participation in school-based learning has dramatically increased, along with FTE reimbursements for high school student headcounts. Also, the study has determined that these same students are simultaneously counted by their school districts for base aid funding and by the community colleges in FTEs. Such practices result in the taxpayer paying twice for one-time instruction taught in the high school with little or no costs borne by the community college. The four SUNY community college case study figures reveal FTE revenue alone with a net $1,324,512 for one year, 1998-1999 (based on $2,125 per FTE to the community college, that's without tuition and chargeback revenue).

The high schools primarily bear the brunt of the costs for the delivery of instruction and the expenses associated with school-based learning, such as instructional materials and texts (provided by both the school district and parents in the case studies). The reality is also that the high schools exclusively provide the physical and human resources, namely the teachers and students in buildings provided by the districts. The colleges, however, free from the bulk of these costs, reap the financial benefit of revenue for this type of learning activity with high schools.

For the high school, the case study principals and teacher "adjuncts" identified their reasons for participation in a school-based program, such as: (a) affordability of college credit early to students/parents and increased credit transferability for "time to degree" savings; (b) student/teacher self esteem values are heightened; (c) college-level course alternative to AP exists; (d) "block scheduling" accommodates year to semester course conversions and gives additional time for labs; (e) enrichment of the school's curriculum to meet college standards; and, (f) decrease course redundancy. However, adequate funding for professional development was found at only one of four case studies. And, no extra funds to compensate high school teacher "adjuncts" to teach school-based courses was found in either the questionnaire or case study data.

For the high school teacher "adjuncts" teaching these school-based courses, they placed a high value on the need for the college to ensure school-based evaluation and professional development. In regard to remuneration, school-based compensation equity issues were secondary to them.

The teacher unions in most of the high schools value the "high esteem" experienced by the teachers. In most cases, it was felt that participation in school-based learning also provides the teachers with opportunities to teach at a higher level. However, the unions fear that the membership will be taken for granted as involvement in this type of learning continues and teachers' pedagogical effectiveness is tested by increasing school-based class sizes.

For the most part, case study community college senate and union leaders' view the administration's justifications that such learning increases enrollments is-- unproven. And, the instructional quality of high school teachers teaching college-level courses is suspect, and there are no college funding mechanisms in the budget to provide an adequate quality assessment of teaching in the high schools.

The research questionnaire and case studies revealed that "on-paper" course syllabus, texts, assignments and teaching credentials are consistent among the community colleges and high schools. However, only one of the four case studies provided contractual funding to the department chairs to conduct evaluative school-based assessment reviews at the high school.

On the other hand, a school-based program serves as a college-level learning alternative to Advanced Placement (AP). Unlike AP, school-based learning opens access to a variety of students. AP is more elitist than School-Based and AP is taught to the exam that serves to provide credit validation. The fact that a school-based course has no external validation is part of the objection raised by those critics from the four-year colleges who claim that these courses are not equivalent to the course taught on the college campus. Yet, discussions with school leaders indicate that the lack of external validation itself is not the main problem since New York State secondary schools have only minimal validation in the Regents exams, and most states have none. Moreover, college courses usually have no external validation.

Conclusions

The study is the first of its kind to provide a descriptive analysis of school-based learning while participation in such programs continues to rise among SUNY community colleges. The findings of this study should be useful to a number of parties, especially prospective or currently participating institutions offering school-based learning. Many states have been encouraging college-level learning in high school programs. This research presents information which can inform college and school administrators decisions about school-based college-level programs. The amount of the involvement in school-based programs by the institutions participating in this study, as well as the range of their policies, structures, support and practices will provide the basis for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

If school-based learning continues with such rapid growth, without adequate funding to track the transfer of school-based credits, to provide professional development and evaluative quality assessment, academic integrity will be threatened. Such failure may affirm skepticism of four-year colleges and universities that insist that college-level learning only takes place on a college campus. This failure will undercut CLLHS as a viable alternative to AP; it will impact the transferability of school-based credit; and it will diminish the esteem values of students and teachers. Faculty unions, which are already fearful of the effect that school-based course loads can have on job security, will be even more wary if opportunities for students to transfer school-based credit diminishes.

To conclude, a disjunction exists as the rapidity of school-based growth is absent from the agenda of state policy to question school-based quality and finances. As the financial motivation for community college engagement in CLLHS becomes more suspect, school-based learning should be more closely examined. The findings from SUNY and the New York State Education Department interviews for policy and documents--produced these cooperative guidelines (excerpts below) which are available to SUNY community colleges in: SUNY Guidelines on college credit courses in high schools and SUNY Guidelines on Academic Good Practice.

First, "The quality of the teaching of the course is to be reviewed at each offering by full-time college faculty, and end-of-term evaluation by the department or division chair."

And, "The appointing institution has a commitment to support the professional development of the high school teacher."

Recommendations

Among the recommendations is a call for "inclusion," inclusion of all parties associated with college-level learning, including the high schools, whose voices need to be heard to ensure quality control and to validate school-based courses. These voices must include representatives from each of the participant groups: colleges, high schools and state governing bodies.

Boards of Trustees and states should mandate funding that is necessary for college faculty and high school teacher professional development, evaluation and assessment, to guarantee that school-based quality control is in place at the high school. Responsible leadership will ensure financial equity to alleviate the overburdened high schools and preserve the essence of the college credit course guidelines for New York State and other states whose colleges participate in college-level learning with high schools. Academic standards for such innovative credit programs which foster values of high esteem for teachers and students, resulting in "time to degree" savings for parents and students must be maintained. Only then, can quality, not expediency and self-interest, become a characteristic of school-based college-level learning.

Lastly, four operational recommendations can be made to help ensure school-based learning validation:

1. *Authority:* Authority in the governance and administrative structures to enable responsible persons to carry out their duties of ensuring that quality control measures are in place at the high school and under the review of the college faculty. Such authority becomes "shared-authority" when it comes from the boards of both the college and the school partners, in the form of a mutually agreed-upon written policy, to ensure that quality learning practices are taking place.
2. *Finances and Budget:* Adequate funding earmarked specifically for the school-based program must be budgeted, in order to provide the level of administrative structures and faculty support required to meet the level of participation and to ensure that quality control is in place at the high school. Without adequate funding and resources, school-based learning cannot be validated. Budgeted items should include the resources necessary to carry out all of the human and physical operations "off-campus" at the high schools, as well as quality enhancements, which include non-voluntary professional development for the teacher to teach school-based courses at the "college-level." Establishing such budgets in the college complements the resource provisions made by the high school and can help to ensure that the school-based course is equivalent to the course taught on the college campus. Such school-based equivalency should be primarily based on the evaluative review and monitoring practices of the "on-campus" faculty in collaboration with the high school teachers.
3. *Quality Assurance:* Evaluative assessments in school-based programs in the high school is necessary. Developing a comprehensive syllabus or course portfolio which is reviewed by peers is another way to assess such learning programs. Such a syllabus or portfolio would enable comparisons to be made of the school-based course's content, text, assignments, examinations, and grading to the equivalent course that is taught on the college campus. Such practices ensure that college-level courses in high school are genuinely college caliber and heed the cautionary note sounded by the former president of Simons Rock College, "Simply copying a college syllabus will not guarantee a college course, nor will repeating facts indicate that a

real college experience has been achieved." Consistent supervision or peer review practices at each community college's partnering high schools would ensure the potential for evaluative quality assessment of school-based college-level learning programs.

The colleges must provide the resources essential for quality assurance "off-campus" in the high schools. Quality control measures from the college's regular academic programming are solely needed to ensure that school-based coursework is equivalent to the course on the college campus. The academic departments and faculty in the college curriculums are the *quality control agents* needed to ensure that school-based course development, instructional delivery (teaching), and evaluation (testing) is "college-level." In cooperation with high-school teacher "adjuncts" in the schools, the college faculty become the catalysts who can ensure school based course validation to all the stakeholders: students/parents, college/school administrations, state governing bodies, and to four-year institutions of higher education accepting CLLHS credit for transfer.

4. *Tracking:* Mechanisms to track CLLHS graduates and the college-level credit earned in secondary school are essential to validating credit transferability. Cooperation between state governing bodies to maintain these data is necessary from both the secondary and higher education levels. Credit-transfer assurances resulting from such tracking will assist in maintaining CLLHS integrity and may provide the data necessary to gain acceptance from four-year institutions who are currently skeptical.

Future Challenges

Future studies of School-Based College-Level Learning and the outcomes of transferring such credit to institutions of high education (public and private) will undoubtedly center around the sufficiency of evaluative assessments to assess school-based course equivalency as "college-level" in the high school. Versatility, the very nature of CLLHS requires the integration of a comprehensive academic quality control system to the educational process that enlists the mind set that measurability, and thus viability, would enhance the evaluative assessment process. Much like industry's "step by step" measures to ensure ISO 9000 quality control systems which assess the sufficiency of raw material throughout the complete manufacturing process, criteria needs to be established as sufficient for evaluative assessment of learning in future school-based programs. The following assessment strategies are recommended to find answers to the question: What evaluative assessments will ensure school-based learning quality?

1. Assessment of syllabus, texts, syllabus, and exams - - to determine lesson plan and "on-paper" conformity to the course outline learning outcomes.
2. Assessment of instruction - - to determine that the quality of teaching is the same in the high school as it is on the college campus.
3. Assessment of evaluation for grading equivalency - - to determine that the measured learning is the same for the school-based course as it is for the courses taught on the college campus.
4. Assessment for a continuum of learning - - to determine if school-based CLLHS student performance experience is equivalent to the "on-campus" college performance experience for equivalency in subsequent college courses.

Clearly there is a need for the college to go beyond a focus on revenue generation to providing structures and a faculty culture that ensures quality school-based programs. The concern is that other community colleges who decide to develop such learning programs will follow suit and fail to put in place appropriate kinds of administrative structures and faculty support. A way must be found to prevent such a situation and to ensure that quality and not expediency and financial self-interest become a characteristic of school-based college-level learning.

With the cooperation of all the stakeholders, the potential exists to ensure that school-based activities meet quality and equity standards for all public high school students. This study's recommendations for "inclusion" may bring attention for the need that exists to improve divergent conditions and to view school-based learning courses for what they are supposed to be, college-level and equivalent to the course taught on the college campus. Rather than being widely dependent on the discretionary resources that individual colleges may want to provide and with limited support that the schools can give, it is the responsibility of states to ensure equitable funding practicing.

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