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In Brief

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Dual Credit: Then and Now

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Dual credit, the approach by which students receive both high school and college credit for the same course, has received enormous attention in recent years. The original intent of dual credit was to provide more challenging curricula to academically prepared high school students. Over the past three decades, the target recipients of the program have expanded to include a wider range of students, including average and even under-achieving students (Clark, 2001). The growth of dual credit since the late 1990s has been described as "explosive" (Andrews, 2001). Waits, Setzer, & Lewis (2005) reported that 71% of public high schools in the U.S. offered dual credit courses in the 2002-2003 school year. Along with other complimentary research, the Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success (APASS) study recently reported that dual credit courses are offered by high schools in all 50 states (Bragg, Kim, & Rubin, 2005). (For additional information about APASS, see *http://www.apass.uiuc.edu.*)

A close cousin to dual credit, exam-based programs, such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB), trace back to the mid 1950s (Clark, 2001; Greenberg, 1989). However, Hebert (2001) noted that dual credit students did not need to take a test administered by an external source to qualify for college credit; rather, credit was awarded based on the entire course and not on test results. From this perspective, the origin of dual credit goes back to the 1970s. Fincher-Ford (1997) conducted a literature review and interviewed high school and community college administrators nationwide. Her study reported that dual credit programs existed in the early 1970s, although the number of programs did not grow significantly until the 1980s. According to Fincher-Ford, Syracuse University's Project Advance was the first configuration of a secondary and postsecondary dual credit partnership. Examining the history of dual credit programs shows that early program initiatives were mostly implemented in local settings, especially led by community colleges.

Dual Credit Programs Initiated on the Institution Level

Syracuse University's Project Advance (SUPA) program was established in 1972 to address the senioritis issue in Syracuse, New York (*http://supa.syr.edu/SupaOnline/factsheet.html*). At first, this program targeted mostly high academic achievers (Boswell, 2001; Gaines & Wilbur, 1985) but has expanded to include all qualified high school seniors interested in the challenge of rigorous college-level coursework. Assuming the vanguard role in dual credit, SUPA is known for its large enrollments. Beginning with seven high schools, currently, over 6,000 students from 134 selected high schools participate in the SUPA program annually (*http://supa.syr.edu/about/index.html*). Following this model, several dual credit programs emerged throughout the nation. These include the LaGuardia Community College's Middle College High School in 1974, Florida International University's Partners in Progress program in 1982, and Kingsborough Community College's College Now program in 1984.

The Middle College High School program in LaGuardia Community College started in 1974. This dual credit program focused on high school students at high risk of dropout. The program presented rigorous academic environments and provided intensive faculty and peer support. It also assisted students through extensive counseling. Students took college-level courses based on an interview with a Middle College counselor, and their academic progress was occasionally checked by the same counselor (Cunningham & Wagonlander, 2000; Wechsler, 2001). Hoffman (2003) reported that of the 4,500 students enrolled in Middle College High School National Consortium schools in 1999-2000, about 41% of them took college classes, showing a 97% pass rate. With support from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, the Middle College high school concept expanded to include the Early College high school initiative, and it has continued to grow. Bragg, Kim, & Barnett (in press) report that the Early and Middle College High School initiatives are found in 22 states.

Florida International University's Partners in Progress (PIP) program started in 1982, a pre-collegiate program targeting minority students, especially students from inner-city high schools (Greenberg, 1989). The target students were those who were not traditionally college-bound and expected to have the high school diploma as the terminal degree. Extensive counseling and special support was found to be helpful to finish high school and pursue postsecondary education. The Invitational Scholars Program, available to PIP participants, has helped support over 500 college graduates since its inception in 1984 and continues to grow (*http://www.fiu.edu/~iss/*).

Similar to SUPA, the College Now program started at Kingsborough Community College, one of the colleges in the City University of New York (CUNY) system in 1984. College Now's defining goals are to help students meet high school graduation requirements and be prepared for success in college. This program focuses on average achievers, usually ranging between the 65th and 80th percentile ranks in high school (Burg, 2002; Crook, 1990; Kleiman, 2001). Results of an evaluation by Crook (1990) showed that the program was effective in increasing rates of college entry, retention, and completion, even when high school academic ability indicators were controlled. In 1999, the College Now program was expanded to include every college in the CUNY system in an effort to eventually provide opportunities for students in every New York City public high school. The program is coordinated by staff at the University's Office of Academic Affairs. Individual programs are conducted by each of the seventeen undergraduate colleges. The programs are staffed by college personnel and many hundreds of public school teachers, counselors and administrators—without whose involvement and support, the program would not be able to function.

The centerpiece of College Now continues to be the opportunity for qualified students to take college credit courses while still in high school. Eligibility for enrollment is determined by Regents Exam scores, grades, and teacher/counselor recommendations. Most courses continue to be taught at the high schools by high school teachers appointed as adjunct faculty members. However, several colleges have decided to offer sections of college-credit courses to College Now students on campus. For those students not yet ready to take college-credit courses, College Now provides opportunities to develop the essential academic skills necessary for high school graduation and college preparedness.

From 2001 to 2005, the numbers of students served grew almost 47 percent, with more than 32,000 students registered for credit and non-credit courses in the past year. Course and activity enrollments during the same period increased by more than 78 percent, with 55,580 in the 2004–2005 school year (S.Cochran, personal communication, May 11, 2006).

Dual Credit Programs Initiated on the State Level

In response to the increasing interest in and demand for dual credit programs, several states have implemented state-level policies (Robertson et al., 2001; Bragg, Kim, & Rubin, 2005). The first such dual credit program was initiated by state legislation is Minnesota's Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program. Minnesota adopted statewide dual credit legislation, entitled the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Act, in 1985 (Boswell, 2001; Clark, 2001; Greenberg, 1989; Oregon Joint Boards of Education, 2000). Within the program, any 11th and 12th grade students who met the regular admission standards of the postsecondary institution to which they applied were allowed to take regular college courses on the college campus at state expense. Observing the success of this program, several other Midwestern states adopted the model, including Michigan, Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio (Boswell, 2001; Clark, 2001; Oregon Joint Boards of Education, 2000).

The Minnesota dual credit program has grown steadily. Between 1994 and 1995, a total of 6,671 public high school juniors and seniors took college-level courses through this program, representing approximately 6% of total high school juniors and seniors. By 2005, the Minnesota Higher Education Services Office website reported that, during the 2004-05 school year, 7,441 Minnesota high school juniors and seniors participated in PSEO at a post-secondary institution. In addition, PSEO has created arrangements between postsecondary institutions and the school districts sometimes referred to as "College in the High School." It is estimated that, during the 2004-05 school year, 14,000 high school students participated in a college-level course using this option (Minnesota Office of Higher Education).

The success of the Minnesota dual credit program is linked to the passage of the Running Start legislation in Washington state. In 1990, the state of Washington initiated expanded educational opportunities for public high school students (Boswell, 2001; Clark, 2001; Oregon Joint Boards of Education, 2000; Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2002). Initially this program allowed qualified 11th and 12th graders the opportunity to take college courses at community and technical colleges without paying college tuition. In 1994, the legislature expanded the program to include three 4-year universities because a school district does not always have a community college in its district. The program's popularity continued to rise. Between 2001 and 2002, enrollment in colleges totaled 14,313 individuals with 8,521 of them as full-time students, representing an enrollment increase of about 4% over the previous year (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2002). Though controversial because of the rapid pace with which some students have accelerated through two years of college, Running Start has been linked to positive student outcomes. For example, Andrews (2004) reported the grade point averages of the initial group of students were higher than a similar group not enrolled, and 10% more of the initial group graduated than other students (Andrews, 2004). The Running Start program continues to draw enormous attention and interest from the public and has provided a model for other states to consider when establishing dual credit programs (Boswell, 2001; Clark, 2001).

Another effort in the state of Washington is the College in the High School Program (CHP). As in Minnesota's program, students take college level-courses at high school locations taught by a high school or college faculty member who is qualified to teach in accordance with state standards. In addition, local high school and colleges administer this program based on locally developed agreements. During 1997 and 1998, 21 colleges and universities served 3,585 students through this program (Oregon Joint Boards of Education, 2000).

National Level Research on Dual Credit

A growing number of studies are shedding light on the status of dual credit on the national level. Although state and national data are not consistent (Hoffman, 2005) there are common issues addressed in many studies. A primary focus of early dual credit research has been on institutional involvement and enrollment growth. A 1982 study with a representative sample of American higher education institutions found that 87% of these institutions were admitting qualified high school students prior to high school graduation (Fluit & Strickland, 1982, cited in Oregon Early Options Study, 2000). Crooks (1998) reported that about 204,790 high school students were involved in dual enrollment courses in the

U.S. in the 1995-1996 school year. Four years later, Clark (2001) estimated the number of dual credit students as 560,000, or about 8% of the total high school students in the U.S., in 2000. One year later, Boswell (2001) reported that at least 38 states offered formal dual enrollment (including dual credit) programs. Kleiner and Lewis (2005) reported that, in 2002-2003, a nationally representative sample of public high schools revealed 71% offered courses for dual credit with an enrollment of 1.2 million students.

Frazier (2000) looked at state laws and regulations regarding dual enrollment policies in the U.S. and found that the scale of dual enrollment implementation greatly differed among the states. He grouped all 50 states into three categories according to the degree of the state's control and dual enrollment operations. His study found that dual enrollment programs were operated through state legislation in 23 states, whereas 12 states had no state legislation but a state agency that lead in the development of guidelines to direct dual enrollment programs. Dual enrollment programs operated based on local agreements between school districts and colleges in the other 15 states. The lack of consistency in state policy is an issue also discussed by Karp, Bailey, Hughes, & Fermin (2004). An area that continues to be of concern to researchers is how states expand access to dual credit to a broader range of students.

Although started as a mechanism to expand the academic offerings to college-bound high school students, dual credit has been identified as one mechanism to facilitate transition to college for an increasing number of historically underserved students. (Hoffman, 2005). Hoffman cites two issues that prompt further research regarding dual credit: (a) its role in restructuring the last two years of high school to expand options for all students and (b) extending public education through the 14th grade so that all students have access to a free postsecondary credential (Hoffman, 2005). Fueled by education reform on several fronts, the expansion of dual credit offerings to other student populations has widened the potential impact and ramifications of this growing phenomenon.

Karp et al. (2004) analyzed dual enrollment (including dual credit) in ten categories including target populations, admissions requirements, location, student mixture, instructors, course content, method of credit earning, program intensity, funding, and mandatory nature of states' policies. They reported 38 states had policies relating to dual credit or dual enrollment, and the policies varied widely. Access and quality were the major policy issues that arose from their analyses and are issues cited in other national and state research initiatives (see Waits, Setzer, & Lewis, 2005; Bragg, Kim, & Rubin, 2005; Kim, Bragg, & Barnett, 2002). Kruger (2006) summarized the issues in three categories: diluting quality, access to dual credit by low-income and low-achieving students, and lack of oversight to assure rigor.

Access to dual credit has been identified as an important issue by several national level research initiatives. In a study of examining the extent to which academic pathways improve access and student success, Bragg, Kim, & Rubin (2005) corroborated Karp et al. (2004) findings that state policies vary widely and that the rapid growth of dual credit elicits questions about access, rigor, and funding. Through telephone interviews with state level administrators in the 50 states, this study showed that while nearly half of the states mandate that high school students have access to dual credit or dual enrollment only about one-third of the states connect dual credit policy to promoting college transition for underserved students.

As dual credit continues to grow for the many reasons highlighted in this Brief, research will be needed to examine its effectiveness and demonstrate its outcomes for the increasingly diverse populations and institutions involved. Dual credit is complex and multifaceted as students increasingly attend multiple postsecondary institutions within states and across state boundaries. Additional research is needed to examine where and how dual credit growth is occurring and understand its impact on students' educational experiences and outcomes. Students, teachers, and local and state administrators need research-based information to guide their decisions about implementation and link dual credit to other issues of critical importance to higher education, including increasing student preparedness and retention to credential attainment.

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