

Is Dual Enrollment in the Best Interest of Our Students?

by Earl Simpson

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Abstract

Simpson argues that in dual enrollment all the advantages appear to be on the side of the community college.

It is not unusual for numbers to trump quality in the VCCS, but sometimes the educational distortion almost amounts to perversion. In dual enrollment, for example, we enhance our financial standing by attracting students with an amazing promise—less education. Students no longer have to take that senior year of high school English, for instance; they can substitute the freshman year of college English. Thus, senior English disappears. In an era when literacy is generally thought to be declining and there is almost universal dissatisfaction with young people's command of their native tongue, a year of language instruction just disappears.

Does this mean that high school senior English was a superfluous course? That it didn't help prepare students for a rigorous college curriculum? That students are just as skilled after their year of college English as they would have been after a year of senior English *plus* a year of college English? Does it mean that learning to write is like learning to ride a bicycle—that once you've got the hang of it there's little need to improve? That our "better" students can't be improved with further instruction? Does it mean that another year of experience—and perhaps maturity—is not helpful when one confronts the challenges of literature?

Educators would have dismissed dual enrollment as a joke except for one thing—funding of the community colleges depends on numbers. With dual enrollment, the community colleges, and to some extent the high schools, get to tally high school students as part of their basis for funding. True, dual enrollment improves the caliber of students in community college classes because university-bound high school seniors (and juniors) find themselves in community college classrooms. But that is an advantage to the college, not the students. In fact all the real advantages appear to be on the side of the community colleges. We have found a way to improve the caliber of our

classrooms and at the same time turn a profit from our clientele's disregard for education. Putting it in the worst light, we make money by providing less education. In its own peculiar way, this is brilliant. Our marketeers, at least, deserve our congratulations.

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