Dual Credit

Dual credit is the term given to a course where a high school student can earn both high school and college credits simultaneously. Dual credit courses may be taught by high school faculty or by college faculty in the high school, college or university, or through distance education. It is seen as a way to lower student costs, preparing students for the rigor of college coursework, maintaining academic quality, and helping them to complete college sooner all while earning credit toward a high school diploma. This is a first report of a two-part series focusing on this topic.

As part of President Obama’s College Affordability Plan, the U.S. Department of Education views dual enrollment of high school students as an example of an innovative form of higher education. The State of Indiana has been ahead of the game, by passing a policy in 2005, to encourage high school students to continue on to college and to “get off to a good start, thus increasing the probability of academic success in college, ultimately leading to completion of an associate or baccalaureate degree.” (Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 2005)

In the last five years, Indiana high school students participating in dual credit courses have increased by 20,216 students. This is a growth of 150%. Vincennes University has the highest enrollment with 10,207 high school students in fall 2013.

This year, there are 4,123 high school students taking Purdue courses. At Purdue North Central, the population is 41% of the total enrollment. West Lafayette has zero since these courses are only offered in the spring (approximately 600 students admitted).

Studies have shown that students with dual credit experience are motivated to attend college, it helps them acclimate to college, and facilitates the transition between high school and college (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2008; Witt, Lichtenberger, Blankenberger, & Franklin, 2012). Students with dual credit have a statistically significant higher level of college readiness in reading, writing and mathematics (Kim & Bragg, 2008). The chart below provides a three-year average of academic credentials comparing dual credit students to other first time beginners at the Purdue campuses.

In 2008, Institutional Researchers with the Oregon University System found that students with dual credit instruction in the high school did as well as those with college-situated instruction in preparing students for future college work. They repeated the study in 2010 and found dual credit students:

- have a higher college participation rate than high school graduates overall
- who go on to continue to the second year at a higher rate than freshmen who enter college without having earned dual credit
- earn a higher first year GPA among freshmen who continue to the second year of college
- accumulate more college credit if they take dual credit in high school by the second year of college (North & Jacobs, 2010).
Dual credit experience has shown positive results with preparation and initial retention of students. However, a core belief of dual enrollment is that students will graduate faster. Some studies have shown that dual credit increases credit attainment thereby possibly reducing the time-to-degree, but there is little evidence that compares time to college degree attainment of students with dual credit to those without (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; North & Jacobs, 2010).

Initial results for Purdue are encouraging as dual credit students have higher four-year graduation rates. However, a challenge with demonstrating the effects of dual credit is that these tend to be highly motivated and prepared students and therefore have a better chance at succeeding in college than students who do not participate in dual credit. Using a match sample of standardized scores and student characteristics will address this issue.

Later this spring, the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Effectiveness will provide a second report on this topic utilizing a match sample to investigate if the dual credit students are more successful as undergraduate students in terms of retention, graduation, and time-to-degree.