



The Benefits of Dual Credits

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Accelerate Nebraska strongly supports making dual-credit courses readily available to high school students across Nebraska. While information related to Nebraska students' participation in dual-credit courses is fairly limited, these courses appear to offer several advantages for students who plan to go on to college. Dual-credit courses benefit students by:

- Exposing them to college-level work, as well as potential careers if coursework is provided through a career academy;
- Providing them with the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school, typically at a reduced cost; and
- Increasing academic engagement during the senior year of high school while aiding in the transition to postsecondary education.

These points, which can be summarized as the “three E’s” – exposure, efficiency, and engagement – are discussed in greater detail below.

Exposure to College-level Work and Career Opportunities

By participating in dual-credit courses, students get a preview of college-level courses while maintaining the academic support and familiarity of their high school environment. If you attended college, think back to the days before your first semester. If you're like us, you probably had some questions, maybe even some doubts, about your readiness to take on the new challenge of college-level work. While the anxiety that comes with something unfamiliar is still present with dual-credit courses, the opportunity for students to face that challenge in the familiar context of their high school experience may diminish that anxiety somewhat. The high school environment may also help students feel more comfortable in asking for and receiving help, given that college courses represent a level of rigor beyond that of regular high school courses. Having the opportunity to experience, and pass, a college-level course prior to starting college in the traditional sense builds students' confidence and takes away the mystique surrounding college courses.

Of particular relevance to Accelerate Nebraska's mission is the career exposure and training students can obtain through career academies. Career academies are most commonly offered in collaboration with community colleges and often afford students access to dual-credit courses. According to a survey conducted by the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education for its 2011 report on dual enrollment and career academies, 59% of the 164 school district officials that responded to the survey indicated that their district participates in at least one career academy, with these districts enrolling nearly 6,000 students during the 2010-11 school year.¹

With respect to dual-credit offerings, 16 of the 30 Nebraska postsecondary institutions that responded to the Coordinating Commission's survey, 53%, indicated that they offered dual-credit courses. These

institutions reported awarding a collective total of over 55,000 credit hours to approximately 9,400 students in 428 unique courses during the 2010-11 academic year.ⁱⁱ

The figures on career academy and dual credit participation indicate a strong foundation for these programs in Nebraska. The goal moving forward, which Accelerate Nebraska hopes to assist in accomplishing, is to continue to expand participation and program offerings.

Opportunity to Earn College Credit During High School – At a Reduced Cost

By allowing students to gain college credit for courses they'd already be taking to graduate from high school, dual-credit courses offer a unique opportunity to metaphorically kill two birds with one stone. As mentioned previously, thousands of high school students across Nebraska are earning college credit via participation in dual-credit courses. In responding to a survey of Nebraska K-12 school districts as part of the Coordinating Commission's dual credit report, an official from one district stated that "most of our seniors end up with a full college year and some a year and a half of college done ... by the time they graduate from HS."ⁱⁱⁱ This is an example of the efficient, practical head start toward a college credential that participation in dual-credit courses can provide.

Not only is dual credit the metaphorical stone that kills two birds, it typically kills the "college credit" bird at a discount. According to the Coordinating Commission's survey, a large amount of variation exists across school districts and postsecondary institutions with respect to policies on dual credit. However, nearly half of responding school districts reported paying for books and supplies for students enrolled in dual-credit courses, and 73% of responding higher education institutions stated that they offer dual credit at a lower tuition rate.^{iv} While these cost savings are appreciated by anyone funding a student's education, they are extremely beneficial to students from low-income families. Because of this, dual-credit courses are an important means of college access. The Nebraska Department of Education's 2013 High School Feedback Report shows that 94% of 2012 graduates who participated in dual-credit courses while in high school went on to attend college.^v While the vast majority of students will incur additional costs in order to complete a degree program, dual-credit courses lessen the cost of some of the necessary coursework.

Increased Academic Engagement During Senior Year

We've all heard the term "senioritis", and most of us have either lived or witnessed it firsthand. For many high school students, the senior year is when they are least engaged academically. The explanation for this may be rooted, at least partially, in the defined boundary between high school and college. Rather than perceiving one continuous educational experience, many students see a fragmented system with clear end to high school and a new beginning in college, with little connection between the two. With relatively few requirements left to meet in order to graduate, students coast through their senior year with plans to start working on college when it starts – next year.

Dual-credit courses offer a means of bridging K-12 and higher education. In essence, dual-credit courses bring the future into the present, giving students a reason to be engaged during their final year of high school. Career academies offer another way of improving student engagement by aligning education with individual career interests.

Issues Involved in Offering Dual-credit Courses

Now that we've made our case for why dual credit is beneficial, we turn our attention to specific issues involved in their delivery. Among the most significant are the qualifications and availability of instructors, funding, and student eligibility.

Instructors

Arguably the biggest sticking point in offering dual-credit courses involves the qualifications of the instructors. Many postsecondary institutions, and all of Nebraska's community colleges, require dual-credit instructors to have a master's degree plus 18 hours of graduate credit in the subject they are teaching. While approximately half of the state's K-12 teachers have master's degrees,^{vi} many lack the requisite number of credits in a specific subject area.

It bears noting that the Nebraska Department of Education established both a dual credit and a career education teaching certificate to provide a certification pathway for college faculty or otherwise qualified instructors who didn't hold a traditional teaching certificate. NDE requires a master's degree plus a minimum of six graduate credit hours in the subject being taught for purposes of issuing a dual-credit teaching certificate.^{vii} In contrast, certification to teach career education courses is not tied to a requisite number of graduate hours, but rather to competency in the career area being taught as indicated by completion of a prescribed course of study at the postsecondary level; completion of an apprenticeship program; five years of professional experience; or passage of an industry-approved competency exam.^{viii}

Accelerate Nebraska views instructor qualifications as a matter to be decided by respective postsecondary institutions. The Higher Learning Commission, a major higher education accrediting body, requires in its criteria for accreditation that "all instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs", and that "the institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including... establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff." The HLC's criteria also require the institution's program quality and learning goals to be consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations, including for dual-credit courses.^{ix} Provided that the institution's dual-credit offerings satisfy accreditation requirements, we see no need to impose a statewide standard with regard to the qualifications of faculty.

Funding

Another key issue regarding dual-credit courses is funding, both at the student and institutional level. With respect to institutional funding, the state arguably supports dual credit better than any other K-12 or higher education program due to the fact that these courses are literally "dual enrollment." Money spent by K-12 districts is included in a district's needs calculation in TEEOSA, while students participating in dual credit are included in the FTE and reimbursable educational unit (REU) counts that help determine community college aid. While the outcome may be more a matter of happenstance than a deliberate policy action, it does seem that the state is providing additional support for dual credit relative to programs that are solely in the domain of K-12 or community colleges. Because of this, and the fact that the state is constitutionally prohibited from providing aid to nonpublic educational institutions, Accelerate Nebraska does not believe that additional state support to K-12 or postsecondary institutions for the specific purpose of offering dual-credit courses is necessary at this time.

A separate but related issue is student assistance. As mentioned previously, dual-credit courses are typically provided at lower tuition rates, but there are generally costs for the student. Providing assistance with those costs so as to make dual credit accessible for low-income students is an important issue. An existing means of assistance is the Access College Early (ACE) scholarship program, which provides funding for low-income high school students to enroll in college courses at participating Nebraska colleges via either dual enrollment or early enrollment agreements. According to the Commission's 2011 report on dual enrollment and career academies, "the college-going rates of Nebraska low-income high school seniors who received ACE scholarships in 2007-08 and 2008-09 were higher than the college continuation rates of other low-income high school graduates and also higher than the college-going rates

of the non-low income graduates of Nebraska's public schools."^x Accelerate Nebraska supports continued investment in the ACE scholarship program.

In addition to ACE, students may receive dual-credit tuition assistance through local foundations, scholarships, or from the high school or college in which they are enrolled.^{xi} Practices vary greatly across the state. There have also been additional legislative efforts to expand state support for dual-credit students. Two proposals, LBs 1077 and 1106, were offered during the 2014 session, though neither was acted upon.

Student Eligibility

Another consideration in dual-credit offerings is student eligibility. Of the K-12 districts that responded to the Coordinating Commission's survey, 84% determined eligibility, at least in part, by the student's year in school; 71% utilized counselor/teacher recommendations; 47% grade-point average; and 40% some kind of standardized test score.^{xii}

Accelerate Nebraska supports making dual-credit courses available to as many students as possible, consistent with the enrollment standards of participating postsecondary institutions. In other words, we don't expect more selective institutions to change their enrollment standards to afford access to all prospective dual-credit students. However, given the prevalence of community colleges in offering dual credit and the open-access nature of these institutions, it's our belief that academic qualifications should play a minimal role in eligibility. Policies that base eligibility on grade-point average or test scores may disproportionately preclude participation by low-income students, who arguably stand to benefit most from dual-credit participation.

Conclusion

Accelerate Nebraska strongly supports making dual-credit courses readily available to Nebraska high school students. Dual-credit courses provide exposure to college-level work and potential careers; provide efficiency in both earning credits and financing a portion of postsecondary coursework; and offer a means of enhancing academic engagement, particularly during a student's senior year and when offered in conjunction with a career academy. Though there are logistical matters that must be considered in offering these courses, these can and have been overcome, as evidenced by the number of students and institutions participating in dual credit across the state. The challenge going forward is to expand these offerings so as to make the many benefits of dual-credit courses available to any student who wishes to participate.

Endnotes

ⁱ Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. (2011, December). *LB 637 Study of dual enrollment and career academies in Nebraska: Current practice and recommendations for the future*. Retrieved from http://www.ccpe.state.ne.us/PublicDoc/Ccpe/Reports/Dual_Enrollment_Report.pdf

ⁱⁱ Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. (2011, December). *LB 637 Study of dual enrollment and career academies in Nebraska: Current practice and recommendations for the future*. Appendix III: Full survey summary results. Retrieved from http://www.ccpe.state.ne.us/PublicDoc/Ccpe/Reports/Dual_Enrollment_Report_Appendix3.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. (2011, December). *LB 637 Study of dual enrollment and career academies in Nebraska: Current practice and recommendations for the future*.

Appendix III: Full survey summary results. Retrieved from http://www.ccpe.state.ne.us/PublicDoc/Ccpe/Reports/Dual_Enrollment_Report_Appendix3.pdf.

^{iv} Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. (2011, December). *LB 637 Study of dual enrollment and career academies in Nebraska: Current practice and recommendations for the future*. Retrieved from http://www.ccpe.state.ne.us/PublicDoc/Ccpe/Reports/Dual_Enrollment_Report.pdf

^v Nebraska Department of Education. (2013). *High School Feedback Report*.

^{vi} Nebraska Department of Education. (2014). *2013-14 State of the Schools Report*. Retrieved from http://reportcard.education.ne.gov/pg_Teachers.aspx?AgencyID=00-0000-000.

^{vii} Nebraska Department of Education. (n.d.). *Dual credit teaching certificate*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.ne.gov/TCERT/pdfs/DualCreditInst.pdf>.

^{viii} Nebraska Department of Education. (n.d.). *Career education teaching certificate*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.ne.gov/TCERT/pdfs/CareerEdInst.pdf>.

^{ix} Higher Learning Commission. (2014). *Criteria for Accreditation, Number: CRRT.B.10.010*. Retrieved from <http://policy.ncahlc.org/Policies/criteria-for-accreditation.html>.

^x Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. (2011, December). *LB 637 Study of dual enrollment and career academies in Nebraska: Current practice and recommendations for the future*. Retrieved from http://www.ccpe.state.ne.us/PublicDoc/Ccpe/Reports/Dual_Enrollment_Report.pdf

^{xi} Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. (2011, December). *LB 637 Study of dual enrollment and career academies in Nebraska: Current practice and recommendations for the future*. Appendix III: Full survey summary results. Retrieved from http://www.ccpe.state.ne.us/PublicDoc/Ccpe/Reports/Dual_Enrollment_Report_Appendix3.pdf.

^{xii} Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education. (2011, December). *LB 637 Study of dual enrollment and career academies in Nebraska: Current practice and recommendations for the future*. Retrieved from http://www.ccpe.state.ne.us/PublicDoc/Ccpe/Reports/Dual_Enrollment_Report.pdf