

WPA on Campus

"WPA on Campus," a new section of the journal devoted to short articles of a practical nature, provides a forum for discussing issues that are important to WPAs but not readily suitable for publication as full-length, scholarly articles. What follows is a discussion of high school/college dual enrollment from two points of view and a critique of the *MLA Job Information List*.

High School/College Dual Enrollment

David E. Schwalm

WPAs should be aware of a potential threat to our students' chances of developing college-level literacy: high school/college dual enrollment programs in English.

I consider "high school/college dual enrollment" to be a disturbing extension of the concept underlying the Advanced Placement program, the concept that a student should be able to earn college credit for work done in high school. Here is how dual enrollment works. A student enrolls in high school Senior English and simultaneously enrolls in a phantom section of Freshman English at the cooperating college, paying tuition for the course. The student who earns a C or better in Senior English receives credit both for Senior English and for Freshman English at the college. The process may be repeated in the second semester for Senior English II and a second semester of Freshman English. Thus, by passing senior English in the high school, students who pay tuition to the college can also receive credit for college freshman composition.

There are a number of variations on this arrangement. Sometimes the students qualify for the course through a placement procedure, sometimes not. Sometimes the cooperating college determines the curriculum, sometimes not. Sometimes college faculty supervise the high school teachers, sometimes not. Often, these programs are offered through the college's continuing education unit, without the knowledge, consent, or advice of the English Department. Whatever the variations, dual enrollment programs characteristically involve high school courses taught in the high school, by high school teachers, during high school hours, to high school students—for both high school and college credit.

Dual enrollment programs can involve large numbers of students. A comparison with Advanced Placement programs is illuminating. Students who pass an AP English course are not guaranteed college credit. They must take the national test, and not all AP students do so. Of those who do take one or the other AP English tests, only about one-third qualify (score 4 or 5) for college credit, and exemption or partial exemption from composition courses. *In many dual enrollment programs, a student who has paid tuition need only pass senior English to be assured of college credit.* In my own community, one college working with only one of twenty-eight local school districts gave credit for ENG 101 and 102 to virtually 100% of the three-hundred high school seniors who were dually enrolled—in what was called a “pilot” project. Were the practice of dual enrollment to spread, nearly every college-bound high school student with money for tuition could come out of high school with credit for college freshman composition on the strength of having passed senior English.

And the practice is spreading. Especially for tax-supported institutions, the financial incentives are enormous. The cooperating college (public or private) receives tuition and credit hours for doing virtually nothing: no classrooms, no supplies, no clerical support, and often no instructor’s stipend. (If the college pays the instructor, it is usually at low part-time faculty rates, an amount by which the high school’s contribution to salary is reduced; thus, while instructional costs are slightly redistributed, the total teaching cost is the same as if the student got only senior English credit.) Large numbers of students then show up at college with credit for freshman composition so that the demand for *actual* sections of the course on campus is reduced. The state subsidizes one year of literacy education rather than two. The financial incentives are complemented by many students’ delight with this strategy for avoiding freshman composition.

The objections to high school/college dual enrollment can be stated rather briefly:

1. Dual enrollment confuses the awarding of credit hours with the acquisition of knowledge or skill, eliminating the demand for college composition without eliminating the need. Merely giving students credit for freshman composition does not guarantee that they can meet the demands of college-level writing tasks. Students who pass senior high school English are the very college freshmen whose lack of proficiency in college-level reading and writing has regularly been lamented by press and public. Dual enrollment eliminates a year of literacy education that most students need.

2. Dual enrollment arrangements may displace Advanced Placement courses, gifted and talented programs, and other enriched high school English curricula. Some enriched curricula are their own reward, and AP courses offer the students only an opportunity to take a test which will qualify about one-third of those who take it for college credit. Dual enrollment virtually assures college credit to all who participate.

3. The dual enrollment program presupposes that writing is a finite skill—like multiplication—that can be mastered once and for all, thereby reinforcing the view that the function of college writing courses is only to “remediate” the failures of high school courses. In fact, college writing courses are designed to help students cope with the increasingly difficult writing tasks presented to them in the intellectual and social context of college. They must learn to address college audiences, to write about complex and abstract subjects, to draw on the research resources that college writing tasks require, to use college-level reading and discussion as a basis for writing. College writing courses are, by definition, taught in the general context of college—a context impossible to replicate in a high school senior English class.

4. Dual enrollment programs covertly compromise the principal objective of the Wyoming Resolution and the subsequent 4 C’s statement: improved literacy education through the institution of professional teaching conditions. By displacing college composition credit from college courses to high school courses, dual enrollment programs appear to reduce the exploitation of part-time instructors—but only by exploiting high school teachers. Such programs also remove issues of placement, class size, teaching load, curriculum, and academic quality from the purview of post-secondary educational institutions and their accrediting agencies. Anyone with experience in trying to maintain standards in a large on-campus writing program knows that the task becomes nearly impossible when instruction is removed to remote locations and diffused among instructors whose primary allegiances lie elsewhere.

It has been argued that dual enrollment programs encourage students to go to college, on the assumption that high school graduates are more likely to continue their education if they have a few credit hours in hand. Maybe. But the real driving forces behind the rapid spread of dual enrollment programs are, on the one hand, economic incentives (get rid of “expensive” college composition programs by giving everyone credit in high school and get tuition too) and, on the other, students and parents who naively buy into the equation of credit hours with knowledge. It is

extraordinarily difficult to resist a practice that is both economically advantageous and supported by its victims. (I denied composition equivalency to a transfer student who had dual enrollment credit for composition but whose writing sample and test scores put him in the lower half of those who place into basic writing. Both the student and his parents were outraged at me—not at the school that gave him college credit—and showed little concern about his inability to write.)

High school/college dual enrollment arrangements seem to be spreading very rapidly with little discussion of the matter among WPAs. I hope this contribution will encourage such discussion. My own view is that we must resist dual enrollment arrangements individually and as members of the WPA. I suggest the following strategies:

1. WPAs who evaluate transferred composition courses should not accept dual enrollment courses as equivalent to college composition courses. They should notify colleges and high schools that have dual enrollment programs that their courses will not be accepted as meeting college writing requirements.
2. WPAs should avoid getting involved in dual enrollment programs and should work on withdrawing from them if already involved. This is sometimes more easily said than done, as the programs are vigorously promoted by administrators and sometimes offered through continuing education units to avoid English Department interference.
3. The WPA Consultant-Evaluators should pay special attention to dual enrollment arrangements in their evaluations of writing programs.
4. WPAs should encourage professional discussion of dual enrollment at NCTE, 4C's, and MLA national conferences.
5. WPAs should work with high schools in their areas to develop interesting, appropriate, and attractive high school English curricula that will better prepare students for college reading and writing.

High School/College Dual Enrollment and the Composition Program

Michael J. Vivion

At recent meetings of WPAs, high school/college dual enrollment in composition courses has become a subject of increasing controversy. This controversy, in brief whether English departments should participate in programs which allow students to enroll simultaneously in courses for which they receive both high school credit and college credit, reflects one which our department has resolved to its general satisfaction. We decided not only to continue our participation (begun in 1979) but also to increase it. We made this decision, however, not without a great deal of research and some important qualifications. We were aware of the potential for abuse and of our responsibility to provide quality college-level instruction to the students in the program. As a result of our concerns, we developed a program which benefits not only the students but also the department and the participating high schools.

The first step in reaching this decision was to discuss with representatives of local school districts the general concept of college credit offered to high school students. High schools in this area are under great pressure to offer their students the opportunity to earn college credit while still enrolled in high school. The overwhelming response was that these types of programs were perceived as essential opportunities for the districts' students, opportunities which parents both expected and demanded. We discovered that high school students were receiving college credit in a number of different ways: for high scores on ACT and SAT exams; from high scores on the CLEP English exam, both with and without a writing sample; from Advanced Placement classes and exams; from the International Baccalaureate program; and from dual enrollment on courses offered by two other area colleges. District administrators assured us that if we dropped our program they would turn to another source for their offerings.

We had already experienced frustration with several of these alternatives. The university's admission's office had recently sent the department chair a request that the department review its policy of accepting only six hours of credit for the AP English exam. He asked for the review in light of the change in the AP's English exam from one test to two: the Language