

Looking Backward to See Forward: An Investigative History of Dual Credit/ Concurrent Enrollment Writing Courses

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In this bibliographic essay, we examine the history of dual credit/ concurrent enrollment (DC/CE) as featured in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. Defined as precollege courses in which high school students take college classes, these programs have steadily expanded throughout the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 1.3 million high school students took courses for college credit, a number which has continued to grow since this study was conducted between 2010–11. Recognizing the potential impact on writing pedagogy, administration, and research, *WPA* produced some of the earliest articles on DC/CE in the field. Such a prescient move situated the journal at the forefront of pivotal discussions, and to date, *WPA* consistently delivers a nimble roadmap for writing program administrators, teachers, and scholars of composition-rhetoric as they navigate this complicated terrain. Beyond anticipating the rapid proliferation of DC/CE, *WPA* has also endeavored to showcase a broad range of genres that explore these programs through a variety of lenses, offering a dynamic way of approaching pre-college writing instruction. Of particular import, we suggest that the journal's innovative stance of maintaining relevance within the broader field of composition-rhetoric, while meticulously attending to the unique challenges facing WPAs, places the journal into a category of noteworthiness.

Initiating the DC/CE conversation in *WPA* in 1991, David Schwalm and Michael Vivion discussed the merits of dual enrollment, fostering suggestions for how WPAs might approach these programs. Housed in the “WPA Corner,” a new space identified in that issue of the journal as focused on “short articles of a practical nature” (51), their debate served as a touchstone for DC/CE conversations. Ultimately calling stakeholders to

resist these programs, Schwalm argued that pre-college writing instruction limits opportunities to develop literacy skills while also depriving students of learning about writing as it exists in the context of their university (“High School” 52–53). Equally as problematic, it perpetuates the notion that “writing is a finite skill—like multiplication—that can be mastered once and for all” (53). While Vivion acknowledged the potential pitfalls of dual enrollment, his department “decided to accept the reality of the pressures to offer college credit on the high school campus” (57). To begin this work, Vivion collaborated with local high school faculty to develop a dual enrollment program for writing courses that better met established learning objectives. They defined required teacher qualifications, designed curriculum and programmatic guidelines, clarified learning outcomes, assigned mentors, and created professional development opportunities. Being more proactive with these programs, Vivion maintained, significantly improved these courses. Although the Schwalm-Vivion debate took place nearly three decades ago, the concerns that they raised have been reinterpreted and repurposed across local contexts with national implications, demonstrating that their questions are still relevant and carefully considered among scholars.

Eleven years passed before *WPA* published another article on DC/CE. Nancy Blattner and Jane Frick (2002) reinvigorated the script on these programs by chronologically tracing dual enrollment paradigm shifts in Missouri. They noted that Schwalm and Vivion’s predictions regarding the expansion of DC/CE, and the resulting tension of such growth, became a reality. While Schwalm and Vivion were successful in offering a glimpse into the future, Blattner and Frick expanded the conversation by considering the residual effects of these programs with which WPAs are still grappling. Such complexities included a changing landscape regarding the population of students who bypass first-year composition (FYC) or are placed into developmental courses. In essence, this shift created a vacuum where FYC is displaced as the traditional starting point for college-level writing. Blattner and Frick offered an additional wrinkle in regard to DC/CE courses in that official transcripts for high school vs. college record such classes differently—a fact that blurred a critical distinction between DC/CE and FYC in troubling ways. Such concerns did not go unnoticed and “campus WPAs frequently raised valid, but futile, objections to such offerings” (53). Thus, Blattner and Frick’s article marked a critically important moment in highlighting the dire need for stakeholders within the field, and a wider audience, to interface as the increasing popularity of DC/CE courses demanded a response to such a mammoth educational shift.

Following national trends, there was a notable increase in *WPA* articles concerning DC/CE beginning in 2012. In his review of Kristine Hansen and Christine Farris's edited collection *College Credit for Writing in High School: The "Taking Care of" Business*, Schwalm publicly retracted his position on resisting dual enrollment programs. "Vivion," he wrote referencing the 1991 debate, "was perhaps more constructive, trying to show how [a DC/CE program] could be done and that it might have some positive features" ("Taking Care" 223). With this in mind, Schwalm discussed what Hansen and Farris's collection offered the various stakeholders involved with DC/CE courses. In the context of his favorable review, he pointed to a teleological shift in these programs. Once intended to provide more challenging opportunities for advanced high school students, DC/CE evolved to focus on "student participation, persistence, and success in attaining some kind of post-secondary credential" (226). The value of pre-college courses, Schwalm argued, is not found in a student's ability to meet the stated learning objectives, but rather in the pathway toward higher education that such programs can create. Driven by economic concerns, this shift in purpose had a significant effect on college composition instruction, influencing who enrolls in these courses and who teaches them. Ultimately, Schwalm concluded that "Our emerging challenge is to give up trying to control the past, determine where our students are, and figure out how to accomplish our goals in the time we have with them" (228).

Responding to this exigency, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) appointed a committee in 2012 to draft a position statement that "would help WPAs speak with some unanimity and authority when questioned about reasons for their policies" (Hansen et al., *CWPA Position Statement* 180). *WPA* published this statement in 2014, outlining its recommendations for Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and DC/CE programs. While the committee acknowledged that "substitutes for FYW probably does [students] a disservice when the substitutes do not compare well to FYW in curriculum, student readiness, and teacher preparation and supervision," they also noted that those involved with DC/CE need guidance on extant circumstances (12). Offered at the high school, on college campuses, and online, these programs vary according to context, making programmatic recommendations particularly challenging. To ensure successful delivery, the CWPA underscored the importance of collaboration between high schools and colleges. They also encouraged parents and students to be proactive, carefully evaluating student readiness and instructor preparation as they consider the DE/CE option.

Examining the effectiveness of pre-college writing instruction is the concern that Kristine Hansen, Brian Jackson, Brett C. McNelly, and Dennis Eggett addressed in their 2015 article “How Do Dual Credit Students Perform on College Writing Tasks After They Arrive on Campus? Empirical Data from a Large-Scale Study.” Groundbreaking in both content and scope, Hansen et al. attended to the concern that despite the increase in DC/CE, “WPAs have almost no national empirical data for judging the nature and quality of dual credit/concurrent enrollment students’ writing” (56). Their study of Brigham Young University students examined how those who completed FYC through a DC/CE program compared to other populations. Although their results suggested there was “no significant differences between the scores of DC/CE students and those of other groups” (72), all participants, broadly speaking, showed a need for further development. That is, students “did not perform as well as their academic profile seemed to predict they would” (80). Similar to Schwalm’s most recent position, Hansen et al. recommended college-level writing instruction beyond FYC, identifying “an additional first-year course, a sophomore course, linked courses, WAC/WID courses, or all of these” as possibilities (79). Such offerings provided WPAs with thoughtful ways of countering pre-college programming that asks students to merely get FYC “out of the way” (68).

Continuing the conversation regarding the expedition of writing instruction, specifically AP and DC/CE options, Joyce Malek and Laura Micciche (2017) offered an overview of the various approaches that have been implemented in Ohio over the last thirty years. Such state-mandated educational ventures, they observed in their article “A Model of Efficiency: Pre-College Credit and the State Apparatus,” privileged efficaciousness and economics over education. Positioned within the framework of autonomy and integrity, Malek and Micciche took to task state-level interference as it existed in postsecondary instruction. They warned that “if we fail to contend with the larger political forces that encroach on our work, then we cannot begin to ask important questions about the interests served by our programs and our positions in them” (89). Like many previous contributors to *WPA* concerned with DC/CE, Malek and Micciche explored ways to challenge these initiatives. In accordance with the cultural logics of the state, they contended that “When the consumer says they want or value something, the managers might just listen” (93). To this end, they suggested coalition building, calling professors and administrators to work with key stakeholders, including other colleges, local businesses, high school teachers, and students.

The spirit of coalition building and collaboration is continued in “Paths to Productive Partnerships: Surveying High School Teachers about Professional Development Opportunities and ‘College-Level’ Writing,” where Melanie Burdick and Jane Greer (2017) explored this contested aspect of dual enrollment. As previous *WPA* articles have shown, much of the early literature centered on support or protestation of DC/CE programs through anecdotal offerings. In the shuffle of picking sides, however, the opportunity to collaborate was marginalized, silenced, and in many cases villainized. To explore these concerns, Burdick and Greer surveyed secondary teachers in thirteen Midwestern counties. Their findings confirmed that teachers in these settings are flexible and accomplished educators “who draw upon a range of professional resources to define and accomplish their pedagogical goals” (97). The study offered a lucid portrait of places for improvement regarding professional development opportunities, which are commonly facilitated by WPAs. Of the high school teachers who participated in DC/CE-related professional development, “only 28% felt they used that knowledge daily” (91). The survey further identified critical misalignments that warrant attention. For instance, “Though only 22% [of high school teachers] were aware of the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, over half who were aware of it (53%) felt it impacted their teaching on a daily basis” (91). Recognizing the significance of their findings, Burdick and Greer suggested that WPAs would be wise to engage more energetically with high school teachers; such collaboration would advance the direction of DC/CE partnerships and pedagogy in deeply enriching ways for all stakeholders.

Synergistically carrying forward the call of Burdick and Greer, Caroline Wilkinson (2019) conducted an interview-based study focused primarily on two high school instructors’ experiences as they taught DC/CE for the first time while concurrently taking a mandated composition pedagogy course. Three tensions emerged from Wilkinson’s study of dual credit teacher education: “the equivalency of a dual-credit course to an on-campus composition course, the creation of a bilateral relationship between high schools and colleges, and the risk professionalizing high school teachers poses to the field of composition” (82). Stemming from these tensions, Wilkinson concluded that dual enrollment programs need to assume a more multidirectional stance with DC/CE to expand collaboration beyond dialogue and “acknowledge that high school teachers are experts in their own right” (91).

As the scholarship reviewed here attests, *WPA* has an established history of addressing DC/CE options, keeping these programs and their wide-reaching implications visible. Since the publication of the Schwalm-Vivion debate in 1991, the journal has provided readers with inventive ways of

approaching pre-college writing instruction. All indicators point to the likelihood that DC/CE will continue to spread “like kudzu” (Hansen et al., “How Do Dual Credit Students Perform” 57), amplifying the need for such work, particularly on a national level. As we look to the next forty years, we are confident that *WPA* will heed the collective call to monitor and report on the pulse of these programs.

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