

Seizing the Initiative: The Missouri Model for Dual-Credit Composition Courses

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Over half of the members of the 2002 graduating class at West Platte High School in Weston, MO, had already completed a dual-credit college composition course when they received their secondary diplomas last spring. During the school's 2001 fall semester, 35 of the school's 63 seniors (55%) signed up for Grade 12 Advanced Composition, and because they each paid \$141.48 in tuition fees to the University of Missouri–Kansas City (UMKC), their high school coursework also counted as ENG 110, Freshman English I, the university's first-semester composition course. If the dual-enrolled students scored at the Proficient or Advanced Levels in communication arts on their eleventh-grade Missouri Assessment Program exams, they were eligible to receive a \$120 state tuition refund, but even without the rebate, the students paid just a third of the fees they would have been charged for the three-credit course if they had waited to enroll in it as first-year students on the UMKC campus ("High School/College Program Changes in Enrollment Procedures"). The students also paid no book fees because UMKC provided the high school with texts for the course: a university-prepared publication describing ENG 110 requirements, a college rhetoric, and an essay reader.

The students, divided into two sections of 17 and 18 students each, attended class daily for 54 minutes, completing reading and writing projects as prescribed on the ENG 110 departmental syllabus, as well as additional coursework assigned by their teacher. At the end of the semester, the students' course grades were recorded as Advanced Composition on their high school transcripts and as ENG 110 on official UMKC transcripts, making it extraordinarily difficult to identify their course work as a dual-credit offering should the high school students transfer their composition credit to another university.¹

The Advanced Composition/ENG 110 instructor at West Platte is a master teacher with excellent credentials. The chair of the school's English department, she has completed an MA in English with additional graduate course work in composition, including participation in two National Writing Project Invitational Institutes. She receives no additional pay for teaching the dual-credit classes, but is released from her teaching duties to participate in biannual professional development meetings at UMKC for dual-credit composition teachers. UMKC also provides her a 75% tuition rebate for any course work she might complete at the university.

The West Platte/UMKC partnership is representative of a rapidly progressing, nationwide paradigm shift in the delivery of first-year college composition. College writing program administrators (WPAs) throughout the country are now faced with the challenge of collapsing one or more of their institutions' composition courses into junior and/or senior English taught by high school English teachers. Offered on high school campuses during regularly scheduled periods, these dual-credit classes (also called joint or dual enrollment, depending on the state) are a "double dip" for the hundreds of thousands of teenagers enrolled each term; the students earn college composition and high school English credits for completing a single course. The participating institutions also "double dip" because the high schools and universities both claim the student enrollments for the composition course for accounting and/or funding purposes.

Prior to 1980, only a handful of dual-credit composition programs existed. These were similar to Syracuse University's Project Advance, with admission to dual-credit courses restricted to the most academically talented of the college-bound seniors in a few, selective high schools (Lambert and Mercurio 28). During the Reagan era, however, policy statements such as the 1983 *Nation at Risk* report describing the paucity of academic rigor in our secondary schools and calling for a college preparatory curriculum for all students in an increasingly technological and literate society—including four years of high school English—received wide dissemination, affirmation, and state-by-state implementation (Russell 1-3). High schools shifted their focus toward academic subjects in their curricula, and increased percentages of graduating seniors—estimated to be 75% for the class of 2001—matriculated to post-secondary institutions (*Raising our Sights* 22).

Legislators, policy makers, and higher education governing bodies nationwide have endorsed dual-credit offerings as an effective and economic means of creating a seamless learning environment, grades K-16. The 2001 report of the National Commission on the High School Senior Year, for example, recommended that states "align the academic content"

of grades 11-14 so that sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds who are “ready for post-secondary work” could complete college work while in high school (*Raising our Sights* 32). Demand for college credit offerings in high schools, including dual-credit composition courses, has escalated. By fall 2001, at least 40 of 50 states allowed for college composition to be delivered as a part of high school English.²

Using Missouri as a chronological model of the paradigm shift, we note that in 1986 the State Board of Education increased high school graduation requirements with a recommended college preparatory curriculum that included four units of English. In 1990, legislation permitting dual credit was passed. By 1994, so many first-year students were arriving on the state’s postsecondary campuses having already completed one or more of their composition courses while in high school that we began to collect data about the dual-credit composition programs in the Missouri Colloquium on Writing Assessment’s (CWA) annual “Missouri Writing Survey.”³

Early in 1997, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education added academic benchmarks, including the availability of and the percentages of students enrolled in dual credit and AP courses, to school districts’ re-accreditation criteria; subsequently, dual-credit composition enrollments and programs mushroomed. Our CWA survey’s 1998 results showed that 4,800 students at 184 high schools were co-enrolled in college composition and junior or senior English courses—taught by their high school teachers as a part of their regular high school day. This was an enrollment increase in dual-credit offerings of 63 percent over the 1994 survey, with nearly 70 percent (22) of the 32 responding two- and four-year institutions brokering dual-credit composition courses to high schools within their geographic area (“Missouri Writing Survey Conducted” 8).

While on-campus composition enrollments remained relatively stable during the 1990s, WPAs responding to the CWA surveys noted an increasing bipolar split in their on-campus offerings: more first-year students enrolling in developmental composition at open-door institutions (students who did not complete dual-credit composition in high school) and more students bypassing one or two first-year writing courses (students who did complete dual-credit composition).

A larger and more comprehensive survey also conducted in 1998 by the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education confirmed the state-wide proliferation of dual-credit courses. Thirty-four of the 41 responding colleges and universities reported that they had dual-credit programs in place with high school teachers teaching courses to their high school students totaling 125,128 college credits. Composition I was the second-most frequently offered dual-credit course in Missouri,

following college algebra. Enrollments in dual-credit offerings in the state are expected to continue to increase. In his 2001 keynote address at Missouri's Annual Transfer and Articulation Conference, the Commissioner of Education called for a doubling of dual-credit offerings to "implement integrated standards and assessment" in our secondary and college classrooms (King).

Part of the growth in dual-credit courses can be attributed to the economic and staffing incentives they provide over the traditional on-campus composition delivery system. The college/high school course is a wise investment for students and their parents in that participating students usually pay substantially-reduced course fees or, in a few states, no tuition at all (Russell 90-91). In Missouri, dual-credit students are usually charged one-third to one-half of the credit-brokering institution's regular tuition, with either the college or high school providing textbooks ("Missouri Writing Survey Completed" 15). Despite offering these courses for no or substantially-reduced tuition charges, however, colleges and universities make substantially more profits than on-campus offerings because the instructional facilities and teachers' primary salary and benefits are provided by participating high schools.

From a staffing perspective, dual-credit composition course offerings could also be perceived as an improved delivery system. Poorly-paid, marginalized faculty teach most on-campus first-year composition courses, constituting "an enormous academic underclass [. . .] which many consider the worst scandal in higher education today" (Conference on College Composition and Communication). A fall 1996 survey conducted by the Association of Departments of English revealed that only 16.5% of the nation's first-year writing courses were staffed by tenured or tenure-track faculty at BA-granting institutions and that only two percent of first-year writing courses at PhD degree-granting universities were taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty (18-19). The CWA's "2001-2002 Missouri Writing Survey" results showed that 70 percent of Missouri's on-campus first-year composition teachers were graduate teaching assistants or part-time faculty members receiving no benefits; ironically, the teaching assistants' mean per course salary of \$2,627, which did not include tuition stipends, was considerably higher than the \$1,945 mean per course salary for part-time faculty, a trend which has existed for more than ten years (Missouri Colloquium on Writing Assessment, "2001-2002 Missouri Writing Survey Results"). In contrast, the high school teachers teaching dual-credit courses were senior staff members in their schools, receiving full-time salaries with benefits.

By the mid-nineties, WPAs participating in the CWA recognized the futility of attempting to shut down the ever-increasing and ever more popular dual-credit offerings in the state; instead, they decided to work

collaboratively to shape the policies and guidelines for administering such programs. Missouri WPAs unanimously adopted the CWA's "Guidelines for the Delivery of Dual-Credit Composition Courses" at the Colloquium's 1995 meeting (Missouri Colloquium on Writing Assessment, "Guidelines"). While beginning with a declaration that its members "oppose[d] the collapse of the college freshman composition course into the high school senior English course," the policy statement established parameters for the structure and content of dual-credit composition courses, qualifications for the high school faculty instructing the classes, and procedures for assessing students enrolled in dual-credit coursework. The CWA document revolved around several key tenets:

College teachers, whenever possible, should be the instructors of dual-credit courses.

Syllabi in dual-credit composition courses should be approved by and mirror those used in the English departments of institutions granting the dual credit.

Students taking dual-credit should be screened using a direct measure of their writing ability.

A liaison from the postsecondary institution's English department should be appointed to work with the high school faculty member teaching the course.

Dual-credit teachers should be provided with support services.

Dual-credit classes should be discrete; that is, students should be in classes composed only of other students taking the course for dual credit.

Assessment of student work should be shared by the high school teacher and the college or university liaison.⁴

The delivery of dual-credit courses should be the joint responsibility of the participating high school and the institution granting college credit.

Recognizing that college faculty would rarely, if ever, be the teacher of record in a dual-credit course,⁵ the policy statement included an appendix recommending that high school teachers should have a master's degree in the discipline of English and be approved for teaching college composition by the English Department of the post-secondary institution granting the dual credit. In order to facilitate the approval process, high school teachers interested in becoming dual-credit instructors were asked to prepare a packet of materials including, but not limited to, a

vita; complete transcripts; a letter of recommendation from the principal; a letter of application from the teacher, discussing experience and background work in teaching composition, the teacher's general philosophy of teaching composition, and his/her expectations of students likely to enroll in the course; and a description of the training the teacher had received in composition theory and evaluation of student writing.

An additional appendix in the CWA guidelines described the role of the university liaison, who is to be a fulltime faculty member in the department of English with experience in teaching composition. The liaison's purpose is to assist the high school teacher in conducting the dual-credit class by providing support and information. In fulfilling these expectations, the liaison is expected to visit the dual-credit classroom a minimum of three times per semester.

The principles expressed in the CWA guidelines were intended to foster the integrity of the composition course while at the same time protecting the interests of the high school teacher and selecting the most capable students for dual-credit composition courses. Dual-credit teachers should receive professional development opportunities (and funds) comparable to their on-campus counterparts.⁶ Furthermore, the English department of the postsecondary institution granting credit for the course should determine which students are eligible to enroll in college composition, using its course placement process, plus the assessment of a piece or pieces of student writing to make the decision. In "mixed classes"—i.e., classes which combine students receiving only high school credit for the course with those students who are receiving both high school and college credit (and paying tuition for the college course)—student performance for college credit should be assessed by an external measure, such as the SAT II Writing examination, the Advanced Placement Language examination, or institutionally-approved assessment instruments.

Once adopted, the CWA dual-credit composition policy statement was used by member WPAs at their institutions as leverage in implementing its provisions. The Colloquium Executive Board also disseminated the statement to Missouri's college and university administrators and to administrative staff for the Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE), encouraging its enforcement and calling for the CBHE to revise and strengthen its own regulations regarding dual credit. Of particular concern to Missouri WPAs was the then-frequent administration and delivery of college composition courses to area high schools without the involvement of the WPA or English department unit administrator of the institution brokering the dual credit. For three years, beginning in 1996, CWA published and distributed a chart listing institutions' compliance or noncompliance to the composition dual-credit

guidelines, as reported by WPAs who completed the annual “Missouri Writing Survey.” CBHE staff arranged for WPAs to make presentations about the CWA composition guidelines at the state’s annual Transfer and Articulation Conferences. From 1997 to 1999, executive board members of the CWA responded to drafts of the CBHE’s proposed revisions of its 1992 “Dual Credit Policy Guidelines.”

Most of the CWA dual-credit composition guidelines were adopted in the state’s 1999 revision of its “Policy Guidelines for the Transferability of Credit Obtained in Dual Credit Programs.” These included the following key conditions:

Students must meet the same prerequisites for course placement as on-campus students (and have a minimum 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale and be approved by their high school principal).

On-campus faculty in the college discipline must approve the selection and be involved in the evaluation of the dual-credit composition teacher; they must also approve the syllabus, textbook(s), teaching methodology, and student assessments for dual-credit courses in their disciplines.

Dual-credit teachers must have a master’s degree with a minimum of 18 hours in the academic field.

An on-campus faculty member in the discipline must serve as liaison to the dual-credit teacher, completing site visits and developing and approving assessments to ensure dual-credit course “quality and comparability.”

Dual-credit teachers must participate in the same orientation and professional development activities as other on-campus adjunct faculty teaching the same course.

Chief Academic Officers (CAO) at state institutions must file an annual report outlining the scope of their dual-credit programs and providing evidence of their compliance with state guidelines. These reports are available for review, upon request, to any CAO in the state.

The strengthened CBHE Guidelines, then, provide the state’s WPAs with the authority to oversee the implementation of their institution’s dual-credit composition offerings.⁷ A closer look at how the WPA at Southeast Missouri State University has used the CBHE Guidelines (and the CWA dual-credit guidelines) in developing and implementing the program for dual-credit instruction in place at that institution

demonstrates both the strengths and the limitations of the new statewide policy. Students who attend orientation on campus and their dual-credit counterparts on the high school campuses are admitted to EN 100 English Composition I by sitting for a fifty-minute writing placement exam. The WPA is responsible for the design of the test, for pilot testing the topics, and for selecting the schedule of essay topics to be administered. In order to ensure comparability during the examination itself, the tests at all locations are administered by trained personnel from Southeast's Office of Testing Services. Under the leadership of the WPA, the students' essays are holistically scored using a six-point scale by the same team of trained faculty readers who evaluate students' placement essays during on-campus orientation sessions.

In order to ensure that students have access to the same opportunities for test preparation, the high school dual-credit teachers are required to participate in a half-day training workshop on campus, presented by the WPA, that introduces them and faculty on campus to the holistic scoring process and to the criteria and scale that are applied to student essays. Participation in this workshop serves as a valuable professional development activity for the high school teachers in multiple ways: as an opportunity to learn the process of holistic assessment of student work, as partners in a dialogue about designing writing assignments and setting assessment standards, and as a time to network with other teachers of college composition courses.

At Southeast, high school dual-credit teachers undergo a rigorous approval process by the department of English. Interested teachers are required to complete a lengthy application packet and to demonstrate background experiences or training in composition theory gained either through completion of a National Writing Project Institute or EN 600 Orientation Seminar for Teaching Assistants, a three-credit hour seminar that focuses on a review of the epistemological evolution of composition instruction, primary composition theories, and pedagogical procedures in designing a composition program.

The CBHE Guidelines assign the academic department responsibility for certifying such high school teachers as eligible to teach dual-credit classes and for recommending the continuation of the teacher in the dual-credit program. At Southeast, the responsibility for initially approving the dual-credit instructors falls to the members of the Committee on Dual Credit, all of whom are full-time composition faculty in the department of English. After such certification is granted, the chair of the dual-credit committee assigns a full-time faculty member with extensive experience in teaching composition to serve as the liaison between the

department and the high school teacher. Currently, there are six faculty members, including the WPA, who serve as liaisons to the teachers in the high schools offering dual credit in Southeast's service region.

The liaison's primary purpose is to assist the high school teacher in conducting the class in accordance with the guidelines established by the departmental syllabus, but the liaison also serves as a resource and mentor for the high school faculty member. During site visits, the liaison may give a guest lecture to the class, may review students' essays or portfolios, or may simply observe the high school teacher's performance in the classroom. (The latter type of evaluation is not unlike the performance evaluation that occurs for all adjunct faculty systematically on the Southeast campus.)

During one recent high school visit, a liaison read students' essays and evaluated them using assessment criteria in place at the university. Then, she discussed the strengths and weaknesses in the writing samples and gave students ideas of how to strategize when planning for an argumentative essay. Another liaison recently gave a guest lecture in a different high school classroom on storytelling technique in narrative writing since the students had been asked by their teacher to incorporate dialogue into their essays. These "guest appearances" provide the high school students with a sense of a broader audience for their writing and occasionally with another teacher for the period. For the high school teachers, the liaisons' visits are often welcomed as confirmations of their grading practices or as opportunities to network with a colleague from the campus.

The program at Southeast has experienced both the rapid expansion and the tension that were predicted in two articles on the topic of dual-credit composition courses written by David Schwalm and Michael Vivion, and published in *WPA: Writing Program Administration* in 1991. When dual-credit composition was first offered by Southeast a decade ago, only three area high schools participated; today, that number has grown to 14 with one new high school offering dual-credit composition every third semester. During the 1994-1995 school year, 150 area high school students received college credit for successfully completing their high school dual-credit composition course. By the 2000-2001 year, the number of students had more than doubled. The English faculty members at Southeast were alarmed by the rapid growth of dual-credit composition classes. Yet opting out of brokering dual credit was not a feasible choice. Since Southeast is the only four-year post-secondary institution in its service region, the faculty members realized that if they were unwilling to support the offering of dual-credit courses, state institutions at a far greater geographic distance would fill the void. If other institutions offered dual credit in Southeast's service region, it was unlikely

that the careful monitoring of the program that exists under Southeast's auspices would continue. As a result of this concern and because dual-credit programs generate both money and identify potential students, the university continues to provide dual credit to high schools in the area.

As dual-credit courses proliferated in the 1990s, not only in Missouri but across the nation, campus WPAs frequently raised valid, but futile, objections to such offerings. In his 1991 viewpoint article about dual-credit composition in *WPA*, Schwalm encouraged WPAs to actively "resist" their institutions' embarking on such programs because they fail to replicate the "intellectual and social" context of a college writing environment, because they "eliminate a year of literacy education" for participating students, and because maintaining "standards [. . .] becomes nearly impossible when instruction is removed to remote locations and diffused among instructors whose primary allegiances lie elsewhere" (52-54).

In the counter viewpoint article in the same *WPA* issue, however, Vivion accurately predicted that dual-credit courses would only increase and recommended that WPAs "respond to this reality by creating dual-credit programs which offer students quality college-level instruction" (60). Nearly a decade later, Schwalm regretfully acquiesced that Vivion had been right in his prediction. Policy makers' endorsements, economic incentives, and enthusiastic student, parental, and administrative support had rendered dual-credit composition programs a permanent part of the first-year writing curriculum. According to Schwalm, WPAs throughout the country now have no choice; they must "take ownership" of these offerings in order to maintain the integrity of their college composition programs (Simpson).

Through the work of the CWA in Missouri, WPAs began the critical task of taking ownership of dual-credit programs in the mid-1990s. They tracked dual-credit enrollments; they adopted and promulgated policy guidelines for their delivery; and they worked with the state's coordinating board to ensure that WPAs and their academic units approve and evaluate dual-credit composition teachers and syllabi. As a result, Missouri WPAs are reasonably confident that when students matriculate to their campuses with dual-credit composition credit—from their own or from another state institution—that the dual-credit course content and assignments replicated the transferring institution's on-campus offerings of that composition course.

NOTES

¹ The only method currently available for identifying students with dual credit is by determining whether the semester in which the dual credit was awarded occurred prior to the student's high school graduation date.

² The results of a 1997 survey conducted by the State Higher Education Executive Organization (SHEEO) show dual-credit programs offered by a multitude of two-year and four-year colleges and universities in 36 states (90-91). Our fall 2001 follow-up to that survey via a query to Writing Program Administrators on the WPA-L listserv indicates that four more states have joined the dual-credit ranks since the SHEEO study. We have been unable to verify that there are dual-credit course options for high school students in these states: Alaska, Delaware, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Vermont.

³ The Missouri Colloquium on Writing Assessment conducted its "Missouri Writing Survey" for 13 years, beginning in 1989; results for five years, beginning in 1995-1996, are available online at <http://www.mwsc.edu/cwa>. This statewide organization of writing professionals from two-year and four-year institutions of higher learning across Missouri has met annually at a member-institution campus since 1987 to share and critique writing assessment projects and to develop and implement proactive stances to statewide initiatives related to composition assessment, dual-credit courses, and general education competencies.

⁴ While the grade in the dual-credit course is assigned by the high school teacher, students' placement essays are read by the same team of university readers who evaluate students' essays for placement during on-campus orientation sessions. During the semester, the high school teacher and the liaison may jointly assess student work or independently evaluate essays and compare results. Students may be required to keep portfolios of their work, which would then be evaluated by a team of university faculty if a question is raised about a student's grade.

⁵ In the history of dual-credit composition instruction in Missouri, only one post-secondary institution has ever sent one of its own faculty to instruct a dual-credit composition course in the high school setting; that practice has been discontinued. A faculty member from Southeast Missouri State University, however, taught a dual-credit course via interactive television during the spring 2002 semester.

⁶ While some dual-credit teachers receive a "per student" stipend, others receive no additional compensation for converting their courses into college level classes. The state's 1999 "Dual Credit Policy Guidelines" now require colleges and universities to provide high school teachers "access to regular pedagogical and resource support such as professional development workshops."

⁷ Unfortunately, however, the CBHE Guidelines do not cover interactive television (ITV) or online (Web) offerings of college composition to high school students who are jointly enrolled in a high school English course at their high school, and ITV delivery systems are currently being used by some high schools in Missouri as a means of circumventing the state's policies for minimal teacher qualifications, student eligibility, and academic support for students in the class.

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