

## “Taking Care of” Writing

David Schwalm

Hansen, Kristine, and Christine R. Farris, eds. *College Credit for Writing in High School: The “Taking Care of” Business*. Urbana: NCTE, 2010. 314 pages.

In my various stints as a WPA in the 1980s and early 1990s, my primary job was to create the best writing courses I could for meeting the first year composition requirement at my institution. But then I had to turn right around and determine who could be excused from these marvelous courses because they “didn’t need” them. The students who allegedly “didn’t need” them fell into several different categories. The smallest group were those who “challenged” the course by taking the CLEP (College Level Examination Program) exam, a multiple choice test sometimes including a writing sample. Then came the slightly larger number who had scored high enough on the Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exams to claim exemption from FYC. The largest group by far were transfer students who had taken FYC courses at other institutions and were, not unreasonably, expecting to receive equivalent credit for them at my institution. This was an especially large number at Arizona State University, which, in those days, had over twice as many seniors as freshmen. Although the courses that they took at the other college couldn’t *possibly* have been as good as ours, at least every student had had a college level writing course that met someone’s FYC requirement somewhere. Or so I thought. But hidden within the population of transfer students was a growing number of students who had earned their college FYC credits through a program called “dual enrollment,” or DE. That is, they had taken courses in high school, taught by the high school teacher during high school hours, for which they received credit from both the high school and from a sponsoring college or university. As these courses were seldom identified on transcripts in any

special way, it was difficult to identify DE credit. These students looked like transfer students, but they were different. The credit came from the college. The course was taught in the high school. DE looked less like transfer and more like AP, without the test.

As a WPA, I was not eager to exempt *anyone* from our FYC requirement. WPAs generally view FYC as a critical gateway course to college academic writing, not as a "barrier" course or "remedial" course to make up for the alleged failure of high school. At the same time, I knew that many students—and their parents—dismiss FYC simply as a requirement to "get out of the way," along with most other general education course work. This attitude was picked up by college admissions people eager to use FYC exemption as a bargaining chip to attract strong students. While not impervious to such insults, I was not too concerned about the test-based exemptions because the number of students who would miss out on the ASU FYC experience was small. No one was totally exempted based on a test. We gave no *credit* for the CLEP but offered students with high CLEP scores, including the writing sample, *placement* into an "honors" one-semester composition course that met the two-course FYC requirement. A 4 or 5 on one of the AP tests (English Language or English Literature) got credit for ENG 101 and 3 hours of general elective credit, but the student still had to take ENG 102. We had a similar deal for the International Baccalaureate students, of whom there were very few. We agreed to accept FYC courses from Arizona public universities and community colleges as direct equivalents as part of a statewide transfer agreement, but we also had statewide discipline-specific workshops once or twice a year to ensure that equivalency was more than a professional courtesy. We continued to evaluate transfer work from many other institutions on a case-by-case basis, although we built a data base of past decisions to expedite the process.

But "dual enrollment" (DE) was a different creature altogether. The students who had DE credit were hard to identify. We did not know what sort of courses they had. The potential for there to be large but invisible numbers of them was huge. Finding this alarming, I thought it might be a good idea to get some professional discussion going about it. Thus, over 20 years ago (in olden days before WPA-L), Michael Vivion and I published dueling articles in an issue of *WPA-Writing Program Administration* about dual enrollment—specifically, the practice of giving high school students the opportunity to take courses in high school for which they receive both high school and college credit toward graduation. Although models vary, the standard dual enrollment (DE) course is taught by a high school teacher in the high school during the regular high school hours. The students enroll in the course both with the high school and with the sponsoring college. The

extent to which the sponsoring college controls curriculum and instruction varies from program to program. (The term “concurrent enrollment” applies when a high school student simply registers for a course taken on a college campus.) As first year composition is the most ubiquitously required course in academe, it is the most frequently targeted and taken course for DE, although DE courses in other subjects are offered.

In our articles, both Vivion and I were wary of this phenomenon and were answering essentially the same rather skeptical question about DE: What do we do about it? From what I had seen, I argued that we should nip this thing in the bud because it 1) confused learning with awarding credit, 2) competed with AP and IB without any common check on quality, like the AP exam, 3) reinforced the popular notions that writing is a finite skill and that the main purpose of first year comp is to remedy the failures of high school, 4) was driven more by multiple financial incentives than academic quality, 5) removed control of curriculum and instruction from college instructors, and 6) could not recreate the cultural context of a college classroom (52–53). Vivion argued 1) that it was too late, that the bud had already flowered, 2) that DE could possibly be more appropriate vis-a-vis composition than AP courses, and 3) that our best move was to embrace DE in order to ensure that it be done as well as possible since there were others waiting in the wings eager to do it badly. He proceeded to describe extensive efforts at the University of Missouri—Kansas City (UMKC) to make sure that the program was at least equivalent to what they offered on campus while helping to build a mutually beneficial relationship with area high school English teachers (57–59).

I felt that my fears were justified. In 1988, I initially encountered DE in its most rudimentary form as it emerged in Arizona. The sponsoring college had simply designated senior English 1 and 2 at some Phoenix high schools as equivalent to ENG 101 and 102 at the college. Students taking senior English who also enrolled in (paid tuition for) a “phantom” section of ENG 101 or 102 at the college got both high school and college credit upon passing the course. The college did little but collect tuition and underwrite credit. I got involved because Arizona State University had state transfer articulation agreements with the sponsoring college, and thus ASU was obliged to accept credit for ENG 101 and 102 earned through DE as equivalent to our courses. It looked like a “credit laundering” operation. Initially, Vivion had found almost the same situation in Kansas City some years earlier, but he and his colleagues had been working subsequently to build a DE program with integrity, characterized by “direct supervision of teachers, departmental approval of participating faculty, opportunities for professional development, collaboration between on-campus and high school fac-

ulty" (57). Our shared concern was, basically, how we could ensure that DE writing courses were, in fact, genuine college writing courses—operationally defined as being equivalent to the on-campus writing courses offered by the sponsoring college. I argued that it couldn't and shouldn't be done. Vivion was perhaps more constructive, trying to show how it could be done and that it might have some positive features.

In these earlier days, the rationale for DE was pretty much the same as the rationale for the test-based placement/credit programs like AP, CLEP, and International Baccalaureate. It would provide an opportunity for a relatively small number of especially talented or gifted high school students to get a head start on college by completing typical freshman courses—well within their abilities—in high school while reducing the giddy ennui of their senior year. It was also proposed as a way of enriching the curriculum at smaller rural high schools that could not afford to staff advanced courses.

Now, flash forward 20 years. Published in 2010, *College Credit for Writing in High School: The "Taking Care of" Business*, edited for NCTE by Kristine Hansen and Christine Farris, takes a good hard critical look at the full history and current state of "college credit in high school" enterprises, both the course/test-based programs and DE. The book makes clear immediately that the modest goals and rationales for these activities have shifted dramatically in that last 20 years. Citing an influential 2007 Harvard Education Press anthology *Minding the Gap: Why Integrating High School and College Makes Sense and How to Do It*, editors Hansen and Farris point out in their "Introduction" that the "gifted student" rationale from the 1970s and 1980s has evolved into a massive nationwide effort in which "educational institutions and state governments pay growing heed to the businesses and private foundations urging the *integration of high school and college* [emphasis added]"(xx). This growth has been stimulated recently since DE has become very popular among education reformers who, in these lean times, are looking primarily for ways to reduce the cost of education and increase its efficiency, but also to make the process of earning a college degree more accessible, flexible, and adaptable to an increasingly complex clientele. For years, the College Board and ETS have been lobbying state legislatures to require AP courses in all schools and even to require public colleges to award credit or placement to students scoring 3 or higher on AP tests. There are programs, such as "Early Colleges" funded by the likes of the Gates foundation, that encourage as many high school students as possible to accumulate up to two years of college credit while completing high school. In her chapter "The Composition Marketplace: Shopping for Credit versus Learning to Write," Hansen cites a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2002–03 study showing that 71 % of high schools

offer DE courses, 67% offer AP courses, and 2% offer IB courses (8). In that same year, NCES reported that 1.2 million students were involved in concurrent or DE programs, 74% of those in DE (25). The narrow focus of the program on providing educational opportunity for a small cadre of gifted students and rural students has morphed into an effort to give all high school students early experience with what will be expected of them in college as a way of encouraging college attendance and persistence, with reduced time to degree. Integrating college and high school would lead to producing more college graduates while reducing the college success gap between rich and poor, minority and majority students.

Following Hansen's clear-eyed and comprehensive survey of the "markets" for composition credit (this chapter is the best concise inventory I have seen of most of the dilemmas in which our discipline finds itself), the first half of the book examines the history and development of course/test-based opportunities to earn credit or placement, especially AP. There have long been two basic concerns about the AP program in English: 1) the AP courses—English Literature and Composition and English Language and Composition—grew out of what composition programs may have been in 1950 (basically writing about literature programs) and have been slow to reflect the emphases of contemporary college composition courses, and 2) neither AP writing sample gives us much insight into students' writing competence. Joseph Jones writes about the origins of the AP program and its possible misalignment with the goals of first year composition. Katherine Puhr then describes the progress our colleagues in secondary and postsecondary writing programs have made to bring both AP courses and exams into better alignment with college gateway writing courses. Colleen Whitley and Deirdre Paulsen report data they collected from students who had taken both AP courses and college writing courses about their perceptions of the success (or lack thereof) of alignment efforts. Steve Thalheimer concludes this section with a discussion of the comparative potential of AP and DE to contribute to students' development as writers at the critical juncture between high school and college. Thalheimer has taught both AP and DE courses. This article serves as a transition to the treatment of DE.

The section on DE includes articles in which the authors discuss how programs in which they were involved addressed, essentially, the very concerns that Michael Vivion and I identified in our paired articles in 1991. The key question is whether or how we can ensure that DE writing courses are genuine college level writing courses (a problematic standard in itself, an issue addressed in a 2006 NCTE collection *What is "College-Level" Writing*, edited by Patrick Sullivan and Howard Tinberg and a follow-up 2010 NCTE volume *What is College-Level Writing, Volume 2: Assignments, Read-*

*ings, and Student Writing Samples*, edited by Sullivan, Tinberg, and Sheridan Blau). Barbara Schneider pursues this question in describing how she and her colleagues implemented a Gates Foundation-funded Early College High School Program at the University of Toledo starting in 2006, always with an eye to "broader questions about the purposes of education" (143). Joanna Castner Post, Vicki Beard Simmons and Stephanie Vanderslice, in "Round up the Horses—The Carts are Racing Downhill," recount their efforts rapidly to implement a much-expanded DE program at University of Central Arkansas with appropriate inputs, management, and assessments in place to ensure the quality of courses. Randall McClure, Kevin Enerson, Jane Kepple Johnson, Patricia Lipetzky, and Cynthia Pope write about the advantages a DE program operated by Mankato State University has brought to students and teachers in rural Minnesota through effective collaboration between college and university partners. Miles McCrimmon argues that the partnerships resulting from well-structured DE programs can "challenge some of the persistent binaries that shape the daily work of our profession—between secondary and postsecondary institutions, between two-year and four-year colleges, and even between commerce and pedagogy" (209). Patricia Moody and Margaret Bonesteel review the history of one of the oldest and largest DE programs, Syracuse University's Project Advance, started in 1972. They describe the complex partnerships, networks, and management infrastructure required to maintain a high quality DE program serving 6600 students in 140 high schools in five Northeastern states. Chris Anson describes efforts of the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) to establish national standards for DE programs and to set up an accreditation process based on those standards. Anson explores how those standards must be enhanced and continuously monitored to guarantee consistent quality in DE programs. The section is capped off by Christine Farris's discussion of how the possibility of parity between high school and college courses is affected by the different cultures of high school and college manifested, for example, in the difference between teaching forms and formulas as opposed to teaching ways of thinking about things. All of these authors have first-hand experience in developing and managing DE programs, some of them very large.

In current educational parlance, DE is a "disruptive" educational innovation insofar as it attempts to break down the structural separation between college and high school. In reading through these chapters, whether about course/test-based credit or DE credit, one gets the sense that almost all writers are describing efforts to reduce the disruption, to make the best of a bad situation, to accommodate DE without conceding structural change. Students are looking for the easiest way to "take care of" the FYC requirement,

and we are busy trying to outwit them, to ensure that these evasions will be at least as difficult and educational as taking the actual courses. It is clear that no one is now going to join me in my position from 20 years ago that DE should be stopped in its tracks. We see time and again in these articles the admission that DE is an established fact. The main question now, just as it was for Vivion and me 20 years ago, is: what are we going to do about it? How can we ensure the integrity of the courses? How can we make the high school course equal to the college course? How will we know? We can demonstrate our success through assessment research showing that the work of students taking the course in the high school is indistinguishable from the work of students taking the course on the sponsoring college's campus. And we have some successes of that kind reported. The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) has incorporated in its standards much of what the best programs have been doing to ensure the integrity of DE courses. NACEP has taken it a step forward by creating a template of best practices to guide existing and new programs and to form the basis for accreditation of such programs. And the assessment standards suggested by NACEP would have us checking to see if the performance of DE students is equal to that of non-DE students. The idea is to make the high school course *be* the college course. NACEP defines what a "good" DE program is. Not surprisingly, a good program is characterized by the features or extensions of the features that Vivion and his colleagues were pursuing in the early 1980s: "direct supervision of teachers, departmental approval of participating faculty, opportunities for professional development, collaboration between on-campus and high school faculty" (57). The infrastructure and personnel required are substantial. There are full-time program directors, coordinating committees, summer workshops for participating teachers, careful planning of curriculum, supervision of faculty, and monitoring of student and faculty performance.

And all of this, of course, makes sense—if the goal of DE is to provide a head start on college for gifted students anywhere. But while DE programs have been growing, the purpose of DE has long ago broadened its focus—as Hansen and Farris put it, citing *Minding the Gap*: "they [Hoffman, et al.] propose 'an integrated secondary/postsecondary system, one in which a post-high school credential is the default end point, and in which the transition between sectors is eliminated to the greatest extent possible'" (xix). The change is significant. It essentially renders unnecessary most of the efforts that have gone on over the last 20 years to ensure the integrity of DE courses. The focus is now on student participation, persistence, and success in attaining some kind of post-secondary credential. "Throughput" has replaced specific learning outcomes as the measure of success. Thus, if

it can be shown that participation in DE programs—*in general*—correlates positively with high school graduation, transition to college, and college persistence, and credential attainment—*for whatever reasons*—then DE is a success. A recent example of such research is an Oregon correlation study in 2010, showing that more DE students than non-DE students went to college, persisted beyond the first year, took more credits, earned higher GPAs, and so on (North, 1–2). If we argue that the writing courses offered through DE are not really college writing courses and students aren't learning what they should, naysayers can argue, on the basis of throughput data, either that the courses seem to be doing the job or that they are really not all that critical to achieving the larger "throughput" goals.

But it gets worse. The DE enterprise I encountered in Arizona in 1988—designating existing high school courses as equivalent to ENG 101 and 102 and giving college credit for them—cost almost nothing. Building a program with validated integrity like the programs described in this book and any that would meet NACEP's accreditation standards costs a lot of money. If the "throughput" goals of participation, persistence, and credential attainment can be met without all of this staff, structure, and organization, there is little incentive for colleges to start or to continue to fund the infrastructure designed to maintain course quality. But wait. There's more.

The original model of DE—courses taught in the high school during the high school day by the high school teacher—emerged because "regular" concurrent enrollment—high school students taking a course at the local college or community college—was impossible or seriously inconvenient in many places. With DE, neither students nor teachers had to travel. DE solved the access problem but raised another—the uncertainty about the alignment between the high school courses and the college courses. This was caused by "outsourcing" instruction—for purposes of convenience—to the high school teacher who was caught between high school and college cultures and objectives. Well, in the meantime online education has come of age, computer access is ubiquitous, and just about any student wanting to earn dual credit for just about anything has multiple providers to choose from online. Some might be from the local college, some from Harvard's MOOC, and some from non-accredited course developers like StraighterLine who are working on making a place for themselves as specialists in developing high-demand online courses for colleges or individual students. Students can pursue online credits in groups in the high school lab or at home on their own or on their smart phones. Online courses are convenient. An online DE course *is* the college course taught by a college instructor. The problem of course integrity disappears. Online courses sim-

ply eliminate the need for the DE model and the complex solutions we have come up with to address the problems it raised.

*College Credit for Writing in High School*, which recently won the Council of Writing Program Administrators Book Award for 2012, is an excellent history and analysis of the major efforts over the last half century to provide students with ways to “take care of” FYC courses and similar courses that are popularly thought to “get in the way” of something; we are not quite sure of what. But there may not be much more to say. I am inclined to believe that the future of DE and test-based credit or placement programs will be very short and the hard work just reaching fruition in the NACEP accreditation program for DE will be deemed unnecessary. The newer policy focus on generating more college graduates (i.e. “throughput”), along with the ready availability and convenience of genuine college courses available online to high school students anytime or anywhere, will quickly and significantly diminish the current demand for AP, IB, CLEP, and DE, which, in their organizational complexity and cost, will be victims of Occam’s razor.

Many students will continue to participate in our traditional FYC programs. Others will find different ways to “take care of” their FYC requirements. We are living in the age of “stackable credentials,” made up of credit for knowledge that students have, no matter how they got it. It will become a fact of life, especially in public institutions, that we have less and less control over increasingly large portions of the course work we require for the credentials we ultimately award and are held accountable for. We still have the responsibility of ensuring that college graduates know how to write, regardless of the paths by which they find their way to us. They are what they are when we get them. 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. We have to find new ways to “take care of” writing.

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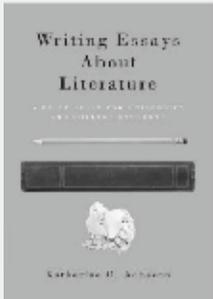
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