



MOVING

Dual Enrollment is Fast Becoming The Norm

THE NEEDLE

By Elaina Loveland



Stephanie Mui completed her master's degree in mathematics at George Mason University (VA) this May—before her high school graduation from Virginia's Oakton High School in June.

She is the youngest-ever master's degree graduate from the university—and it was made possible by a dual enrollment program.

It all began in fourth grade when Mui was told she could skip math class. In the summer of her fifth grade year, she enrolled in a dual enrollment program Northern Virginia Community College. Taking classes online and taking one or two classes a semester and two each summer, Mui finished her associate degree by age 13.

She then transferred to George Mason University and earned her bachelor's degree in mathematics in the summer of 2016—before starting her senior year in high school. Her age never became an issue. She never told her classmates she was younger than they were—and she blended in just fine.

"I really felt like a normal college student with a normal college experience," said Mui, about having finished her college and graduate degrees so early. "And it feels pretty good."

BENEFITS

While Mui's story is aspirational, dual enrollment programs offer a wide range of students many advantages.

Many families would say cost savings is at the top of the list. "There is a huge cost savings to students and families, and students have the opportunity to experience college in high school and it shortens their path to their degree," said Yvette LeMore, director of the Lewis and Clark Community College High School Partnership/Dual Enrollment Program in Illinois.

And for specific student populations, dual enrollment can help with college preparation.

"Students, particularly those who are preparing to be first-generation college students, gain a great deal of confidence by being successful in these courses, knowing that they can negotiate challenging texts and ideas and take more ownership over their own learning," said Christina Parish, director of Syracuse University's Project Advance.

But the perhaps the most remarkable benefit of dual enrollment is that it cultivates a college-centric perspective—one rooted in success.

"I think it's important to recognize that as we increase the numbers of students going on to college, we also need to be focusing on college success and getting a few of these courses under your belt has a very significant impact on your academic momentum," said Adam Lowe, executive director of the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, the sole accrediting body for concurrent enrollment partnerships.

Parish added that dual enrollment is "a great way to jumpstart one's college career."

AACRAO's *Dual Enrollment in the Context of Strategic Enrollment Management* shows that 63 percent of colleges say completing dual enrollment courses improves the likelihood of being accepted to college.

And after they are accepted, these students have a better idea of what to expect and are therefore more successful.

"Skills like syllabus navigation, advocating for yourself to your professor, understanding that in college there are typically fewer assignments and therefore the assignments that you do have a greater weight, and you need

DUAL ENROLLMENT ADVANTAGES



- Earn college credit in high school at no cost to the student
- Take challenging courses in subject areas that high school may not offer
- Explore subject areas for possible future careers
- Learn new and enhanced skills needed for college courses work
- Take classes in the summer
- Earn credit in transferable courses

Adapted from a list provided by Lisa Harper, director of College Credit Plus at the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

to put your 100 percent best effort into those assignments are essential understandings for any student going into college," said Michael Dunn, director of college counseling at AIM Academy (PA).

MANAGING RISK

"Students participating in these programs do generate a college transcript, and so poor performance in a course can have some negative impact in the longer run," said Lowe.

Lowe advises school counselors to work and make sure students and families are aware that there is some risk to having a poor grade, but "at the same time show them the value of stretching themselves academically."

Many dual enrollment programs closely monitor their student's academic performance to mitigate the risk of a student not performing well and earning a poor grade.

To help make sure students on track academically, Dunn plays the role of a student support advocate in AIM Academy's dual enrollment program with Cabrini College (PA). Twice a week, he hosts study hall sessions at Cabrini in the library for the students.

"We talk about how things are going in classes, how their notes are going, what method they use to take notes and whether it's effective, and how they are studying for their next test," explained Dunn.

If a student consistently performs poorly, Dunn pays close attention to the course withdrawal date so the student can withdraw from the course before the deadline.

Kent Scheffel, vice president of enrollment at Lewis and Clark Community College (IL), said that the state allows the Lewis and Clark's High School Partnership/Dual Credit Program to withdraw dual credit students from courses on a later date than typical college students. Having a later withdraw date can allow students who are doing poorly to avoid a low grade appearing on their transcript.

"Parents and students need to realize early on that it really is a college course with the same rigor and standards and they need to take it seriously or it can have long-term implications," said Scheffel.

The University of Connecticut's UConn Early College Experience program goes a step further to help mitigate risk.

Students who earn a C or higher receive credit for their UConn courses. If a student earns a C- or below, the grade converts to an audit on their transcript.

"This opens up the opportunity to take these courses with a little bit of a safety net," explained Brian A. Boecherer, executive director of University

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of Connecticut's Office of Early College Programs and UConn Early College Experience program. "This policy aligns with transfer credit policies—where classes with a C or higher would transfer to another university. The same principle is applied for our students for transferred courses."

AN OPTION FOR ALL

Lowe said that dual enrollment programs aren't just for high-achieving students, like they were several decades ago.

"We as an organization recently adopted a vision where we made very clear that we believe these courses and programs ought to be available to all high school students, rather than being available solely to the high-achieving students," explained Lowe.

Lowe also emphasizes that there are several models of postsecondary education that dual enrollment programs fit into.

"'College' means any postsecondary education, and in this day in age, there are a lot of very high-value associate programs and high-value certificate programs that community and technical colleges offer that are often available through dual enrollment," said Lowe.

AIM Academy sees dual enrollment as such an advantage to students that 100 percent of its seniors participate in a dual enrollment program in partnership with nearby Cabrini College.

The formal partnership between the school and Cabrini College began six years ago. The AIM Academy approached local universities directly to form a dual enrollment program because they wanted to prepare their students for the rigors of college coursework "without dropping them off in the deep end," Lowe explained.

"Part of our philosophy is that we view dual enrollment as experiential learning for how to be a successful college student," said Dunn. "We want all of our graduating students to walk away with the most solid understanding of what they're going to need to do during their early years at college to be successful in the classroom."

A growing number of high schools even host dual enrollment in the building.

For example, Syracuse University's Project Advance (SUPA) trains qualified high school teachers teach university courses during their regular high school day.

Parish, Project Advance's director, outlines how teachers train at a Summer Institute. "SUPA teachers spend the week working very closely with our SU faculty to become familiar with the courses, which benefits students' college readiness. There is a constant dialogue and close collaboration between faculty across secondary and postsecondary institutions."

Lewis and Clark's High School Partnership/Dual Credit Program has approximately 2,000 students participating each year. This state-funded program allows high school students to learn without leaving their building.

Dual enrollment is also a great fit for homeschoolers.

Melinda Stewart, an independent counselor in Littleton, Massachusetts, has worked with community colleges to help homeschool students achieve associate degrees before they graduate from high school.

"It's difficult to get an accredited [high school] diploma as a homeschooled student," explained Stewart. Having the degree makes it much easier for these students to transfer.

Some students fulfill the requirements for an associate degree but take the courses as high school courses rather than for college credit, so they can apply to universities as freshman.

STATES TAKING THE LEAD

Minnesota launched the first statewide dual enrollment initiative in the 1980s. Three other states—Arkansas, Virginia, and Utah—were early to take dual enrollment programs statewide, and many more states have started programs since.

Ohio launched a dual enrollment initiative College Credit Plus as in the 2015–2016 academic year. Twenty-three community colleges, 13 universities, and 35 private higher education institutions participated.

The cost savings in just one year of the statewide program is considerable. The Ohio Department of Higher Education reported that in the 2015–16 academic year—the very first year of the program—more than 52,000 Ohio high school students took college classes earning college credit while meeting their high school graduation requirements, collectively saving more than \$110 million on college tuition.

Ohio knows this is worth the investment.

“Advantages for Ohio include having citizens who have acquired education beyond high school, industry-recognized credentials, and degrees,” said Lisa Harper, director of College Credit Plus at the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

“This program is one strategy to help Ohio move the needle on the attainment goal of having 65 percent of its citizens with a degree, certificate, or other postsecondary workforce credential of value in the workplace by 2025,” she said.

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COUNSELOR CONNECTION

School counselors are the link to both developing and established dual enrollment programs.

“School counselors play a huge role in terms of facilitating getting students in these classes,” said Lowe. “We see a number of places where school counselors are really the glue for our program, and are sometimes even called a site director for a concurrent enrollment program.”

For school counselors who want to explore developing their own dual enrollment programs, Dunn said to look beyond the local community college.

“There are lots of small liberal arts schools all around the country that would love to have high school students,” said Dunn. “We found that the liberal arts institutions in our area have been really supportive of our students, and offered much different opportunities for them than community colleges have offered.”

Dunn also encourages school counselors to have the conversation about college preparation versus transfer of credits. “If the goal is to transfer credits, maybe the community college is a fine option, but if the goal is to prepare kids for college, then I would say a liberal arts school might be a better option.”

No matter the formula, Mui, who will attend New York University to pursue a PhD in mathematics in the fall, said that balance is key for students who want to earn college credit in high school.

“With dual enrollment, you need to learn how to keep a balance in your life,” advised Mui. She said when students choose true academic interests, time management will fall into place. □

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Elaina Loveland is a freelance writer and the author of *Creative Colleges: Finding the Best Programs for Aspiring Actors, Artists, Designers, Dancers, Musicians, Writers, and More*.

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