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Report Critique:

The Utility of Dual Enrollment in Institutional Strategic Enrollment Management and Student College Access



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During the 2010-2011 academic year, more than 1.4 million students participated in dual enrollment programming, which allows high school students to participate in college-level courses (Marken, Gray & Lewis, L, 2013). The federal government has identified dual enrollment as a strategy to promote student access to college (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), however the implications of dual enrollment for institutional strategic enrollment management have not been thoroughly explored. A recent collaboration between the professional organization of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), with support from research partner Hobsons, resulted in a November 2016 report which seeks to examine college perceptions of dual enrollment as an enrollment management initiative. According to AACRAO, this work advances the organization's desire to promote college access and affordability (AACRAO, 2016). The report examines enrollment management and its utilization of dual enrollment using both quantitative and qualitative measures. A survey, which sought to assess dual enrollment programming in the 2015-2016 academic year, was sent to AACRAO

members and garnered close to 400 responses.

Participants were asked to indicate whether they would be

willing to take

part in further interviews, which resulted in ten institutional case studies included in the report. These stories, presented alongside the survey findings, provide a more in-depth view of how dual enrollment might be used to meet college enrollment goals and increasing state mandates to improve college access and affordability. Overall respondents indicated dual enrollment is generally viewed as a viable enrollment management tool, particularly as a means to support student recruitment.

Previous research indicates that students who participate in dual enrollment stand to benefit in multiple ways. Students who complete college level courses in high school are thought to be better academically prepared for college as determined by performance on state standardized tests (Cassidy, Keating &



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Viki, 2010), have increased rates of college attendance, attain higher GPAs, and graduate at greater rates than those who do not participate in such courses (Kilgore & Taylor, 2016). AACRAO's survey found that a majority of respondents felt dual enrollment supports college access by preparing students for the rigors of college and providing proof that a student is college ready, but the data provided reflects only enrollment management *perceptions* of dual enrollment students, not documented student outcomes observed by the institution.

It seems unclear what enrollment management results can be expected from dual enrollment and whether possible outcomes would clearly benefit the host-college or university. For example, the credits students can earn while dual enrolled may be offered at a reduced tuition rate and allow students to gain both high school and college credit upon successful completion. Earning lower-cost, transferable credits reduces the expense of a credential or degree and positively impacts college affordability, which is a broad college access and enrollment management goal. However, while students may financially benefit from these courses, it is not known how or if colleges benefit in ways that offset the expenses incurred and make the program a sound enrollment management endeavor. AACRAO's survey also suggests that dual enrollment collaboration can help to build a college-going culture and increase college awareness in high schools. In return, institutions may benefit by building a student recruitment pipeline,

another enrollment management goal. However, the degree to which institutions are then able to boost enrollment as a result of these partnerships was not fully explored in the present report.

It is important to note that over 20% of survey respondents did not actually offer dual enrollment programs, suggesting such programming is not a universally accepted enrollment management practice. Most institutions that did not offer dual enrollment cited the culture of their institution as the most significant barrier in providing such courses. Four-year colleges generally valued dual enrollment as an enrollment management tool less than two-year/ community colleges and institutions granting both bachelor and graduate degrees, implying that institutional values and goals may also play a part in facilitating the utility of dual enrollment. Approximately one-fifth of institutions without dual enrollment offerings reported that the cost of the program was prohibitive and/or the time required to forge a working relationship with high schools was problematic.

The AACRAO report found that other barriers exist which limit the availability of dual enrollment. Institutions discussed financial challenges on the part of the student and the colleges posed by dual enrollment and perceived difficulties with the transfer of earned credits. A large majority of institutions accept dual enrollment credits in transfer, yet there seems to be lingering concerns, on the part of institutions, about the quality of

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course instruction and the resultant rigor of dual enrollment courses. Of the schools who did not offer dual enrollment, 18% had in the past, but ended their programming due to lack of interest on the part of partner high schools. Over one-fifth of institutions who did not offer current programs did express an interest in offering dual enrollment in the next year, but the likelihood of program implementation was not explored.

AACRAO's work serves to further the conversation on the merits of dual enrollment as an enrollment management strategy, but it does not offer an evidence-based argument that dual enrollment supports broad enrollment management goals. While the work endorses the use of dual enrollment as an enrollment management tool, it most saliently argues that student recruitment can benefit from such programs. Enrollment management is also concerned with student success *after* enrollment, as measured by student retention, graduation rates (Wilkinson, Taylor, Peterson & Machado-Taylor, 2007) and, increasingly, student loan indebtedness and loan repayment default rates, topics which are not thoroughly addressed by the data gathered in the survey. In an environment where colleges are increasingly held accountable for student success, it is not clear that the benefits of dual enrollment are worth the financial and administrative costs on the part of the institution.

Though nine out of ten respondents viewed dual enrollment as a way to improve college

access, a majority of institutions reported that their dual enrollment programs served under 500 students total. There seems to be a hesitancy, even on the part of AACRAO member institutions (who, by virtue of their participation in the professional organization, may be more receptive to new and innovative enrollment management initiatives) to make dual enrollment a widespread program without evidence that supports investment in these initiatives. Therefore, dual enrollment is likely an important tool to support both college access and enrollment management goals, but colleges and universities may not be inclined to implement these programs, as the institutional benefits have not been clearly researched and defined.

The work of AACRAO and Hobsons should serve as a foundation for further research to explore enrollment management outcomes beyond recruitment, such as degree completion time, graduation rates and the education loan debt of former dual enrollment student as compared to non-dual enrolled students, to inform a more compelling argument for colleges and universities to begin and/or increase their commitment to such offerings. As the benefits of dual enrollment for students are well documented, college access professionals must push for such research to promote program expansion and ensure that students can more easily take advantage of dual enrollment opportunities. College access professionals, whose work is often most concentrated on preparing high school students for college admissions, must broaden

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their focus to ensure that students not only make their way *to* college, but also successfully *through* college as well. The present work of AACRAO does support the use of dual enrollment programming as an impactful enrollment management tool but it does not provide an evidence-based rationale as to how institutions might benefit from these programs. The greater development of dual enrollment opportunities has important implications for under-resourced populations who stand to benefit from the positive outcomes associated with dual enrollment participation. Significant barriers, such as institutional concerns regarding cost and the academic rigor of dual enrollment, exist and these issues must be empirically addressed to encourage expansion and steadfast support of dual enrollment programming. It is only through effective high school and post-secondary collaboration that seeks to benefit both students and institutions, that dual enrollment can be utilized to increase both college access and success. 

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