Dual credit kick-starts careers

EVEN IF UNSOLICITED, IT'S unlikely one will make it an entire childhood without hearing the old phrase "experience is the best teacher," likely because it's true.

When learning a language, individuals can study the culture, correct sentence structure, speed and tongue placement. However if they don't actually practice the language, their ability to speak fluently will remain minimal. Likewise, students can prepare for college in many different ways, but taking on college courses firsthand will teach them the most about academics as a college student.

That same line of thinking drives high school principal Jennifer Peirson to advocate for her students' participation in dual credit, a Collin College program in which students take college-level courses taught by college professors for both high school and college credit.

Peirson, who has worked in education for 18 years and administration 12, claims that for students, experiencing college classes prior to leaving the safe confines of high school and the parents' home lays a perfect foundation for college success.

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Student Antoinette Fisher in the Collin College nursing lab.

BY MELANIE HESS Photo by Nick Young

Students accelerate careers

Knowing she wanted to pursue healthcare, Collin College nursing student Antoinette Fisher saw dual credit as an opportunity to kick-start her career.

"Dual credit really helped me get ahead and transition into a full-time college student," Fisher said. "I learned how to deal with the stress of college work, which ultimately prepared me for the rigor of the nursing program."

In her dual credit courses, Fisher loved the academic debates she was encouraged to have with her peers. The professors treated her no differently than a typical college student.

After graduating high school, Fisher glided into her nursing prerequisite courses at Collin College, already having practice with how real-life college courses work. She was even able to take part in the Honors Institute, where she said she enjoyed how the professors made the classrooms come alive with different lecture techniques and discussion.

Stephanie Shyu, a current dual credit student aspiring to one day become a counselor, agrees with Fisher. Taking college-level courses in high school is challenging but worth it.

"They raise my academic abilities to a higher level and have prepared me for a four-year university experience," Shyu said. "Though I know that my time at Collin is transitory, I know the knowledge and experience I've gained will remain permanent in my life."

Shyu expects taking dual credit courses now will largely contribute to her ability to attend graduate school as soon as possible.

Others, like Community High School student Payton Potter, dive into dual credit in order to create more time in their future college schedule.

Potter, a very kinesthetic learner who hopes to become a commercial pilot, feels knocking out some core courses now will make his time in college more flexible, allowing him time to earn his flight hours.

"I find dual credit really engages you," Potter said. "You are learning new things in a different, hands on, kind of way. It's better for me."

AP vs. Dual Credit

As an administrator, Peirson faces issues like whether to offer both dual credit and advanced placement (AP).

"There was some conversation several years ago on whether we could have successful dual credit enrollment and AP programs," Peirson said. "I believe we definitely can. They can serve many different types of students."

Potter said he appreciates dual credit grades aren't based solely on one test.

"It's a cumulative grade from the entire semester," Potter said.

Dual credit also allows students like Potter to become familiar with college-level grading standards.

Continual Growth

The dual credit program at Collin College saw more than 2,400 enrollees last spring, with 175 coming from Pierson's Boyd High School. Peirson said she's thankful she's had the opportunity to watch the dual credit partnership grow.

"Students comment frequently how grateful they are to be exposed to college courses now," Peirson said. "It's become so popular, we are beginning to add extra sections to develop the program even more."