

Giving Credit Where and When It Is Due

Students Earn High School and College Credit Simultaneously

by Heather DARROW



Olivia Kirkman

In May 2015, Olivia Kirkman graduated high school with college credit already under her belt. A step ahead of classmates long before she left the front doors of McKinney Boyd High School, she earned high school and college credit at the same time with Collin College dual credit classes.

"Dual credit is a great idea. You can work around extracurricular activities. My English course was not just reading and grammar. We went straight into writing three papers. Senior year, my friends were complaining about Advanced Placement (AP) English. I was taking dual credit, and I got to choose more of what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it. You can organize your assignments and go as fast as you want," said Kirkman, currently a Collin College freshman.

According to Raul Martinez, associate vice president of P-12 partnerships at Collin College, dual credit classes are taught by professors at McKinney ISD and on the college's campuses and easily transferred to most colleges and universities.

"If you are attending Collin College, you are saving money because we have the lowest tuition in the state, \$39 per credit hour. Time to degree completion is shorter because you are taking college classes in high school. Also, the state legislature no longer puts a cap on the number of dual credit classes students can take, nor does it limit when the students can start. This means high school freshmen can take dual credit, if they are eligible. Eligibility for taking dual credit classes includes high school recommendation, earning A's or B's in high school classes and meeting Texas Success Initiative (TSI) assessment requirements," Martinez said.

Yes, Parents and High School Students Can Agree

It's not every day that parents and their high-school-aged offspring agree; however, families, like the Woodwards and the Grays, value dual credit.



David Woodward

Julie Woodward's son, David, took dual credit English and government and is currently taking economics and English.

"I heard dual credit was a better choice than AP because with dual credit, as long as students pass the class, they will get credit. With AP classes, you have to get a three or above to get credit, and I was told some colleges don't take AP exams and are more likely to accept dual credit," Julie said.

According to Dr. Brenda Kihl, Collin College executive vice president, both dual credit and AP classes offer benefits, but she cautions parents and students to match classes with degree requirements.

"Taking multiple AP or dual credit courses in high school allow students to experience the rigors of

college while they are still in the supportive home environment. Success in these courses factor into college admission decisions and instill confidence in students as they transition to college. Although earning college hours in high school is beneficial on many levels, it is also important to consider the college degree requirements and which courses apply to the degree.

"For example, if students take AP economics and psychology, they can potentially earn six credit hours. However, both classes commonly meet the same general education degree requirement. One course will meet the general education requirement and the other course becomes elective credit if it is not required for the major," Dr. Kihl commented.

This fall, David is planning to attend the University of North Texas and earn an electrical engineering degree with a minor in music composition.

"The number one thing I like about dual credit is that it is actually a college class, so I will be starting my first semester at college with four college classes, which is almost a full semester. It is legitimate college credit, but it also knocks out the high school credit, too. You can kill two birds with one stone."

This summer, David plans to take calculus and chemistry at Collin College, and he says taking some dual credit classes on campus played a role in that decision.

"Dual credit definitely introduced me to the college and heavily influenced my decision to take summer courses because I am familiar with the campus and how to register for classes."

According to Michelle Gray, if her son, Brian, had not taken dual credit history in high school he would probably have taken an additional class his first year at Baylor University.

"He is an engineering major, and his course load is heavy. Having the dual credit class took a load off his semester of engineering and physics classes. I was nervous about him taking a college class in high school with the increase in writing expectations. It turned out that it was a good course. The teacher taught in a way that made it interesting to the students, and Brian was a lot more prepared than I expected. He got an A. The dual credit class was on a 4.5 scale, so it actually helped his class standing," Michelle said.

As a sophomore, Brian says a high school teacher explained the difference between dual credit and AP classes.

"It sounded like a no brainer to get credit for college with dual credit. It is a lot less stress than taking an AP class because if you pass the class,

you get credit. You can get an A in an AP class and still not get college credit if your score is not high enough."

Reflecting back, he says there are hidden benefits to taking dual credit classes.

"My dual credit professor encouraged discussion, and that didn't really happen in my other high school classes. At Baylor University, a lot more of my classes are discussion oriented. I enjoy that, and it was nice to have that in high school with dual credit."

Pondering his good experience and his current curriculum, he adds wistfully, "I would have taken more dual credit classes if I could have fit them in my schedule. I should have taken English because I am taking it now." ♦

Heather Darrow is a freelance writer.

Photos by Nick Young, Collin College.