Dual Enrollment Students: Starting the Library Connection Here

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Introduction

Many school and academic librarians desire to help students successfully transition from high school to college. These librarians from different organizations often hold an interest in working together but can find it difficult to know where to begin. Any effort to establish partnerships of this nature should consider starting with the students we already have in common. In trying to find that right opportunity for collaboration we must not forget that many high school students may already be enrolled in colleges and universities through dual enrollment programs or similar initiatives. Dual enrollment students represent a group where both school and academic librarians have a responsibility to contribute to their success.

Dual Enrollment: History, Growth & Context

The idea of exposing high school students to college level coursework is certainly not new. Over the past half century, in an effort to help students become more prepared for future success, high schools and colleges experimented with a number of programs. Educational leaders and policymakers created new initiatives so students could participate in the college experience while still in high school. One of the most common initiatives is often referred to as dual enrollment, where high school students, most often seniors but sometimes juniors, enroll in one or more college courses before completing high school. In some states dual enrollment programs may be known by different names such as dual credit, concurrent enrollment, or a post-secondary option. These programs differ from some more recent but less common efforts described as early college, where starting in ninth or tenth grade students simultaneously earn both high school and college credit (Brewer, Stern, and Ahn 2007). Dual enrollment also differs from Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs by allowing students to earn credits as a
traditional college student, rather than being awarded college credit for advanced work completed in high school.

The phrase dual enrollment, when first used in the 1960s, had a slightly different meaning than it does today. Policymakers initially defined dual enrollment as “an arrangement whereby a child or youth regularly and concurrently attends a public school part time and a nonpublic school part time” (Gibbs et al. 1965, 1). These early programs, also referred to as “shared time” allowed high school students to participate in activities at more than one school and often involved sharing of resources between non-public and public schools (U.S. House Committee 1964). The 1970s saw growth in the number of programs seeking to build partnerships between high schools and colleges (Brossman 1975; DeLuca 1977; Voorheis 1979). By the late 1970s most states reported activity where high school students could earn college credit prior to graduation. In many, a formal statewide program or policy addressed the dual enrollment concept, while in other states initiatives were more locally based (Vernon 1979).

Programs continued to evolve and by 2003, 48 percent of title IV degree-granting institutions had students in dual enrollment programs (Kleiner and Lewis 2005). Based on an analysis of this same data, Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos (2009) noted that “98 percent of public two-year institutions had high school students taking courses for college credit, compared to 77 percent of public four-year institutions, 40 percent of private four-year institutions, and 17 percent of private two-year institutions” (44). While most of these dual enrollment courses are located on a college campus, others are offered within the high school, at another location, or online (Kleiner and Lewis 2005).

Most state governments now formally design or support dual enrollment programs. The details may look different from state to state but the underlying idea remains the same. By 2005
only ten states lacked legislation or regulation addressing dual enrollment (Karp et al. 2005). By 2008 all but seven states encouraged dual enrollment programs and two more were developing such policies (Ewell, Boeke, and Zis 2008). However, if a state did not create a formal policy that does not necessarily prevent local schools from establishing their own arrangements with colleges.

**Policy Issues & Recent Governmental Action**

Dual enrollment programs have grown in popularity but policymakers still face a number of challenges including issues related to equity, standards, articulation, public relations, and perhaps most importantly, funding (Krueger 2006). When it comes to tuition school districts, state grants, or students may pay the bills (Education Commission of the States 2009). States, universities, and local school districts facing financial difficulties are likely to reduce funds for dual enrollment programs, placing greater responsibility on the students and parents who wish to participate.

So, do these programs positively impact students? Research indicates that dual enrollment can effectively increase student performance and success (Karp 2008; Swanson 2010). At the same time Lewis (2008) acknowledges that dual enrollment can improve performance but questions if these gains justify the costs. Other reports express the concerns of college and university faculty who question the arrangements where students receive college credit for taking courses taught by high school teachers in the high schools (Schwalm 1991). Professors also observed that some students receiving college credit while in high school were not as prepared as more traditional students, and often did not adequately understand important introductory content or the context of the material (Reisberg 1998).
In recent years federal lawmakers attempted to provide greater support for dual enrollment type programs. Senator Herb Kohl introduced the Fast Track to College Act in 2009 which would have provided up to $150 million to support dual enrollment and early college programs while requiring matching funds from local schools (U.S. Senate 2009). The bill was not passed in the 111th Congress. Similar legislation was reintroduced by both Senator Kohl and Representative Dale Kildee in early 2011, with no further action as of February 2012 (U.S. Congress 2011).

**Dual Enrollment in Pennsylvania**

Prior to 2011 school districts in Pennsylvania could apply for funds under a dual enrollment grant through the state department of education, which covered tuition, books, fees, and transportation. “In the 2009-10 year, over $37 million in dual enrollment funds were requested, while only $8 million was available. As a result, each district’s grant was reduced (or prorated)” (Pennsylvania Department of Education). When funding is not available through the state or school district, high school students or their parents pay any remaining tuition and fees for college courses. Some colleges do offer a reduced tuition rate for current high school students to assist with the cost. The Pennsylvania 2011-12 state budget, initially proposed by the governor, stated an interest in expanding dual enrollment opportunities. However, state leaders eliminated all funding for the 2011-2012 year replacing it with a proposal to use a portion of each student’s basic education funding to support dual enrollment (Pennsylvania Office of the Budget 2011).

**Establishing and Strengthening a Working Relationship**

Penn State Mont Alto, a branch campus of a large university, serves about 1,200 students and offers several four year degree programs and the first two years of many other degrees which
can be completed at other campuses within the university. Because many students are from the local area librarians were interested in learning more about library activities at local high schools.

Over the years the library at Penn State Mont Alto had limited interaction with high school students and librarians. This would usually occur when students were advised to visit a college library to complete an assignment, or when high school students might briefly visit the library as part of a campus tour. There was an interest in getting to know some of the school librarians better to share ideas and perhaps partner on projects to help students become more prepared for the first year of college.

With state funding encouraging dual enrollment programs, our campus saw a significant number of students that were still enrolled in high school. Area high schools encouraged juniors and seniors to enroll in one or two classes to earn some college credit before graduation. The program on our campus is known as “dual enrollment” or “early to college”. Students from a school district that was awarded dual enrollment funds from the state are called dual enrollments students. High school students from schools not receiving dual enrollment funds are called “early to college students” and pay their own way (Penn State Mont Alto). Even though state government has reduced support for these programs many high school students still seem to have an interest in completing one or more college courses before graduation.

One of our library’s interactions with high school students resulted from a visit of a high school library club. Later, a Penn State librarian travelled to meet with the school librarian at the school library to learn a little more about how things work on “the other side”. More specifically, the goal was to find out how students use the library in the years just before they enter college. We began talking about opportunities for collaboration and started looking closely at a grant
opportunity. The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant being administered through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries sought proposals for an “Information Access” grant. One of the special priorities was “for college libraries and high school libraries whose institutions are cooperating in a dual enrollment program for high school students” (Office of Commonwealth Libraries, 2008, 2). This seemed like an excellent opportunity.

Several librarians from other area high schools that had students participating in the Dual Enrollment / Early to College program were contacted. They were invited to participate in our grant proposal that could possibility offer some funding to support collaborative efforts. Through a number of visits to high schools and meetings with librarians, we eventually developed a plan of action and established a budget for some activities. We applied for and received the grant of just over $31,000.

During the 2008-2009 school year the Penn State Mont Alto library worked with local high school librarians to support Dual Enrollment and Early to College (DE/ETC) students from several area high schools including: Chambersburg, Greencastle, McConnellsburg, and Waynesboro. Approximately 130 high school students from these schools were enrolled in college courses at Penn State Mont Alto in the Fall of 2008.

The collaborative efforts of librarians at Penn State Mont Alto and the four high schools were supported by this grant and consisted of five key elements.

1. High school librarians and academic librarians initially met as a group at the Penn State Mont Alto library to discuss issues of common interest, learn about the university library, discuss ways to enhance collaboration, plan library/research related activities, establish a budget and finalize plans for student visits to the library.
2. Group visits to Penn State Mont Alto were scheduled so DE/ETC students could learn more about the library and the campus. Along with their high school librarian, students participated in activities designed to enhance familiarity with a college/university library. Topics covered included: how a college library is different from a high school library (organization, resources, and services), the importance of developing a research topic, using a library catalog to find books, using library databases to find articles, understanding scholarly resources, and avoiding plagiarism and citing sources. Each visit lasted for most of the school day and included a group lunch in the campus dining facilities.

3. Grant funds enabled the purchase of library materials at each high school and Penn State Mont Alto to support the specific educational needs and interests of DE/ETC students.

4. Several school libraries expressed a need for additional computers to support students enrolled in college courses. A few computers were provided to school libraries with grant funds. Students enrolled in college courses were given priority on these computers.

5. A Penn State Mont Alto librarian made follow up visits to participating high schools to meet with school librarians, evaluate the efforts and discuss future possibilities.

**Benefits of the Partnership**

This collaborative initiative significantly impacted the programs and services of both the high school and academic libraries. To begin, grant funds allowed significant additions to library collections targeted toward this unique user group. Another large benefit was the opportunity for dual enrollment students to attend an academic library orientation with a university librarian. These students gained a more authentic understanding of academic library resources and conventions while getting acquainted with college librarians. Surrounded by the research
environment of the Penn State Mont Alto library, the dual enrollment students came to a better understanding of the research expectations at the college level while developing an appreciation for using a wide variety of tools in order to access information for a specific need. They learned about the importance of basic research and information technology skills and why information needs to be evaluated critically and competently. Students also understood that professors would expect ethical use of information and personal responsibility in all completed assignments.

Additionally, high school librarians obtained a more clear understanding of how their students would be expected to use academic libraries in the near future. This, along with a greater awareness of common academic library services and resources can help them better prepare students for future success.

Although many dual enrollment students choose to continue at other colleges or universities after high school, this initial exposure to an academic library can be beneficial regardless of where they pursue their education. Once familiar with the general concepts of library catalogs, research databases, subject libraries, and services such as interlibrary loan and course reserves, students will be able to more comfortably use any academic library. In fact, one of our activities involved looking at various academic library websites to observe the many similarities. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this project enabled us all to learn from one another by sharing information and ideas from our different libraries.

**Challenges Along the Way**

Overall, the experience was positive for all involved as evidenced by feedback from students and librarians. However, as with any major project some unexpected challenges arose. None proved to be a true hardship, but several areas required more time or effort than initially expected.
First, a project like this requires a substantial commitment of time. Any grant project includes the completion of a great deal of paperwork. There was the initial grant application, then the quarterly updates with details of all financial transactions, and the final report to document in detail all completed activities. The university and participating school districts also used different procedures for ordering items and processing financial transactions so these differences had to be resolved. In addition to working with multiple business offices, the grant required letters of support from academic administrators at the university as well as the schools. All of the administrators were supportive especially since grant funds were involved and would provide additional opportunities and resources for the students. Fortunately, because it is not uncommon for units within our university to apply for and work with grant funding, assistance was available from professionals who are more experienced with navigating through the process. At some institutions, as experienced in our case, there may even be an office dedicated to supporting those who are working with grant applications and related projects to make sure all of the requirements are satisfactorily met.

Another challenge came when trying to accommodate librarian and student schedules, work around school and university events, and arrange for transportation between the schools and the campus. It is nearly impossible to find a time that is ideal for all when scheduling an event with more than a few people, so we just did the best we could. However, it was somewhat disappointing that the actual student participation in library activities was lower than we had hoped. Many chose not to take the time away from their classes and other activities. But the students who did spend a day on the college campus with their school librarian did seem to enjoy themselves and feel the day was worthwhile. In the future, it may be wise to shorten the length of the student visits to no more than just a couple of hours so more students may be able to attend.
We also could have done a better job of selling our program to these college bound students explaining why it would be beneficial to invest some time now to learn about academic libraries and how they work.

**Going Beyond Dual Enrollment Students**

It is the current trend for high schools to find ways to successfully prepare and transition students to the post-secondary part of their education. Where dual enrollment programs are already in place, a library-to-library connection is a logical component of that process and a good place to start. However, partnerships established to enhance library services to dual enrollment students should not end with this small group of students.

It is likely that after a strong relationship has been formed, the high school and college librarians will find additional ways to work together on future projects that will benefit even more students. As programs and relationships are developed, there is an increased likelihood that information and resources will be shared between the libraries. Consequently, a better understanding of academic expectations and what is being taught on both sides will allow library professionals to better assist students with the transition from high school to college.
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