Dual Credit

Secondary to Post-Secondary Transitions:

Dual Credit Policy and Practice in BC and Elsewhere

Prepared by John FitzGibbon, Associate Director, Transfer and Articulation, BCCAT.

This executive summary and the related full report are both available at www.bccat.ca/research/projects/dualcredit

Introduction

There has been considerable interest in British Columbia in improving secondary to post-secondary transitions, and the provincial government and secondary and post-secondary institutions have adopted a number of strategies intended to aid in successful student transition from one system to the other. This paper looks specifically at the policy and practice of dual credit, i.e., granting credit at both secondary school and post-secondary institutions for completion of a single course. The report surveys the academic literature on dual credit, examines current practices in North America by type, benefit, and issues, and offers some directions to consider.

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Methodology

The data in this paper were drawn from multiple sources. They include a review of the literature on secondary to post-secondary transitional programs; examination of websites of BC Transfer System member institutions; 28 interviews with personnel in post-secondary institutions (PSIs), school districts, ministries, and agencies with responsibility for dual credit programs; and an electronic survey of BC post-secondary institutions. Of the 38 members of the BC Transfer System, twenty-two institutions provided information for this study; including eleven colleges, six universities, BCIT, and four private institutions. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with personnel in the Industry Training Authority (ITA), the BC Ministry of Education, Alberta Education, Go2, and Advanced Placement Canada.

[1] See http://www.nlc.bc.ca/Programs/DualCreditPrograms.aspx

Context

Secondary to post-secondary transitional programs are described in the literature and by governments and institutions in North America using a wide variety of terms. In their review of US dual credit policy, Borden, Taylor, Park, and Seiler (2013) note 97 different terms used for dual credit practices, and identify "dual enrolment", "dual credit", and "concurrent enrolment" as by far the most popular terms. These variations in definition in the US have led to a number of calls for consensus on terminology (Lowe, 2010; Borden et al., 2013).

In BC, definitions vary by institution and agency. Northern Lights College is typical of many BC institutions in describing dual credit as allowing "students in grades 11 and 12 to gain credits towards secondary school graduation while also earning credits in a post-secondary academic course, vocational program, or trade or apprenticeship".[1] A number of BC institutions distinguish between dual credit and concurrent studies. For example, the Simon Fraser University (SFU) website distinguishes between concurrent admission and dual credit. The BC Ministry of Education does not use

the term "dual credit" explicitly, but includes a description of the process in the *Graduation Program Order* and in provincial policy documents. The Advanced Placement (AP) and the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program could also be described as dual credit programs as courses in these programs may qualify for high school and post-secondary credit, although not simultaneously and, depending on the institution, may gain course exemption rather than course credit.

There are, as the range of definitions of dual credit suggests, a number of delivery models currently being employed across the continent making classification and comparison difficult. The forms of dual credit currently employed in BC are dual credit, dual enrolment or concurrent admission, education acceleration, credit in escrow, and early college high schools.

Examining dual credit by target group is an effective means of distinguishing between BC's policy and practice and that of other jurisdictions. Karp, Bailey, Hughes & Fermin (2004) note that, as of the early 2000's, 11 US states identified a target population for their dual credit policies. Dual credit for high achieving students is the most offered and accessed form of dual credit across North America (Kanevsky, 2011; Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013). In comparison, the provinces of BC and Alberta have traditionally emphasized dual credit programs for career-oriented students, although a number of opportunities for other learning pathways/program areas and for high achievers also exist. Recently there has been growth in the number of dual credit programs focused on students at risk of not completing secondary school. For example, the focus in Ontario is on re-engaging disengaged students who have the potential to succeed in college but are at risk of not graduating.

Policy and Practice
in Alberta, Ontario, the United States, and BC

Alberta, BC, and Ontario are similar in that provincial dual credit policy is found in Ministry of Education documents. Dual credit policy in the three provinces tends to focus on support for career-oriented students and student transitions in general while US states have a wider set of policy objectives. Information on US policy is found in a number of sources including national educational

agencies, enabling a more comprehensive comparison of state policies and practices, than is readily possible in Canada given that education is a provincial responsibility and there is no coordinating national education ministry.

Alberta

Alberta's dual credit policy is outlined in the *Provincial Dual Credit Strategy: Call to Action (2013)*. The policy's purpose is to increase high school retention and completion, increase participation in post-secondary education, connect students to the labour market, and expand local partnerships (Alberta Education, 2013). The dual credit initiative is part of a larger provincial strategy to enhance credentialed pathways and regional partnerships, as well as support other forms of learner pathways and sharing of appropriate resources and curriculum mapping. Dual credit opportunities through partnerships can offer courses or programs leading to completion of a recognized program, such as level one of an apprenticeship or a Health Care Aide certificate, and can include academic, Career and Technology Studies (CTS), and locally developed high school courses. *Strategy* funding for dual credit opportunities is based on a one-time only competitive application process that currently supports 51 dual credit partnerships in a wide variety of occupational areas. Alberta Education is currently working on developing a plan for a lifelong learning transcript anchored by the Alberta Student Number. The transcript would include program level identifiers for secondary, post-secondary, and dual credit completion.

Ontario

The broad framework for Ontario's policy on dual credit is found in the pathways section of *Creating Pathways to Success: An Education and Career/Life Planning Program for Ontario Schools, Policy and Program Requirements, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2013*. The document identifies four programs with a pathway focus: dual credit, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship (OYAP), Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM), and school-work transition programs. Specific dual credit policy is outlined in *Dual Credit Programs: Policy and Program Requirements* (2013b), which describes guiding principles, possible program delivery approaches and models, transcription processes, general funding arrangements, assessment and reporting processes, and admissions criteria. The target audience for these programs is students who face significant challenges in completing the requirements for graduation but have the potential to succeed, including disengaged and underachieving students at risk of not completing (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b). All 70 school boards that have secondary schools and all 24 Ontario colleges of applied arts and technology are involved in providing secondary school students with dual credit learning opportunities.

Much of the Canadian research and resources on the topic of dual credit programming emanates from Ontario. The Ministry of Education produces a number of policy documents and resources for schools and districts. For example, the dual credit student data report for the 2011-12 school year provides data on participant numbers, completion rates, success rates, and lessons learned. A recent study funded by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) examined the educational outcomes of students who participated in the Dual Credit and School Within a College (SWAC) program at George Brown College in 2012. This study referenced other research on student attitudes and opinions at Humber College, Fleming College, St. Lawrence College, and George Brown College but noted a general lack of information on academic and post-secondary trajectories and transition outcomes for dual credit students.

United States

A variety of dual credit policies have been in place across the United States for three decades, starting with opportunities for high achievers and followed by growth of career oriented programming and more lately by programs targeted toward at-risk, disadvantaged, and groups underrepresented in higher education. A policy brief on dual credit produced for the Education Commission of the States notes that states create programs for a number of reasons including: fostering relationships between institutions, enhancing efficiency of both systems, implementing rigorous preparatory curriculum, increasing credential completion rates, and reducing the need for remediation (Krueger, 2006). The US Office of Vocational and Adult Education reports that 47 of the 50 states have dual credit policies in place, and notes that these policies vary according to the comprehensiveness of the policy and to the extent to which it addresses funding, participation, venue for course offerings, instructor qualifications, mixture of student types, number and type of courses to be offered, and the credit gained (US Department of Education, 2014).

In 2010-11, roughly 1.3 million US students took classes for university credit before completing high school, an increase of 67% from 2003, according to the US Department of Education (Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013). The US Department of Education reports that high school students took courses for post-secondary credit in 53 percent of all US post-secondary institutions in the 2010-11 academic year, whether in a formal dual credit program or not (Marken et al., 2013) and a US National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) report indicates that 98% of public two-year institutions had secondary students taking courses for credit (2005). The major focus of US dual credit continues to be on high achieving students with the vast majority of high schools that offer dual credit, doing so in academic areas (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, 2010). US studies suggest that the practice of offering dual credit programs and courses has a positive relationship with improving post-secondary preparation and participation, increasing credential completion, and reducing post-secondary remediation (Krueger, 2006).

British Columbia

BC's policy includes a number of rationales for offering dual credit, the most general of which is to help students make smooth transitions to further education and training (BC Ministry of Education, 2005). The BC Ministry of Education (MOE) dual credit policy describes how courses will be noted on secondary transcripts, the types of post-secondary courses that can be granted dual credit, funding parameters, and secondary institutional participation. Other elements such as venue, cost sharing, student eligibility, program structure, and instructor qualifications, are left to agreements worked out between secondary and post-secondary institutions. The MOE will provide funding to school districts for courses delivered to high school students by post-secondary institutions under certain conditions laid out in policy.

Enrolment in dual credit courses varies by school and post-secondary institution with some institutions emphasizing academic acceleration opportunities and others emphasizing career options. A considerable portion of dual credit enrolment in BC is in the Accelerated Credit Enrolment in Industry Training (ACE-IT) program, the purpose of which is to start students into apprenticeship. The Industry Training Authority (ITA) covers the seat costs for post-secondary institutions providing technical training for ACE-IT students. The 14 PSIs offering trades training submit training plans to ITA and indicate the levels of training to be offered including ACE-IT. 51 of 60 school districts register students in ACE-IT, and 2,172 student completed the program in the 2013/14 school year. Overall, dual credit completions increased by 43% between 2007/2008 and 2011/12 with ACE-IT completions increasing approximately 24% over the same period (MOE, 2014a). Surrey, the largest school district by population had the largest number of ACE-IT completers at 159 while across the province the most subscribed ACE-IT trade areas consisted of Carpentry, Professional Cook 1, Electrician, and Hairstylist/Cosmetologist. Both districts and PSIs reported considerable fluctuations in numbers of dual

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credit students although the reasons for that are not clear. Among post-secondary institutions Camosun College has the highest enrolment of dual credit students, constituting approximately seven percent of the total Grade 12 cohort in the five districts of the South Island Partnership, with more than 50% of the total enrolled in non-ACE-IT courses (MOE, 2014a).

The survey and interviews identified a number of goals of dual credit programming in BC. Respondents indicated that transition and preparation for transition was one of the main purposes for their dual credit offerings, as was support for career paths. While ACE-IT offers students a chance to both explore a career in the trades and to start on it while completing high school, a number of institutions offer other career-related dual credit programming including Health Care Assistant, Applied Business Technology, Business, or Tourism. Respondents also identified providing opportunities for challenging high achieving students as a purpose, although they tended not to identify AP or IB as meeting this purpose. From respondents' perspective, students are likely to opt for dual credit in order to save on tuition costs by shortening high school and post-secondary completion times. Many colleges and teaching intensive universities identified recruitment and/or enrolment as a purpose and see the ACE-IT program as a means of encouraging enrolment in their trades programs, and dual credit in academic courses as a means of attracting high achieving students who might not have otherwise contemplated the institution.

Community outreach or engagement emerged as goals of dual credit programming and high school completion and student engagement in their learning were also mentioned as likely reasons that dual credit programs would appeal to BC students. Widening course and program choice was also acknowledged as a goal of dual credit programming. BC colleges and teaching intensive universities with multiple campuses noted that they can share facilities and offer programming to both adults and high school students in the community.

Issues

The literature identifies a number of issues affecting the implementation and maintenance of dual credit programming. Krueger (2006) identified collaboration across the secondary and post-secondary systems, funding, equity in access, standards, articulation, and communications with the public regarding the availability of programs as general concerns. Philpott-Skilton (2013) notes similar issues and adds those related to tracking students and measuring success, and scheduling and registration. In her review of BC and Ontario dual credit, Watt-Malcom (2011) focusses on issues of quality of teaching and content, scheduling, and partnerships while suggesting that issues are more likely to be found in academic dual credit practices than in implementation of dual credit in trades

areas. The issues that emerged from the BC interviews and survey responses were: communications; quality; students; operational issues; research; funding; purpose; and organizational capacity. No issues emerged from the interviews that had not already been mentioned in the literature. Survey responses did not identify any one issue as more important than others, but suggested that there were a number of challenges that equally affect the success of dual credit programming.

Possible Policy and Practice Directions

The survey of BC PSI's suggested general satisfaction with the MOE policy framework for dual credit with some concerns. The issues raised by respondents ranged from purely operational issues such as how to encourage ongoing communication or how to bring schedules and timetables into line to wider policy questions such as what should be included in 'transitions' policy, how to align learning outcomes at the secondary exit and post-secondary entrance levels, and how to encourage long-term successful collaboration between the systems. Based on the analysis, policy directions that may be worthy of further discussion are transitions, alignment, partnerships, and research.

Transitions: A number of school districts and post-secondary institutions indicated that they viewed dual credit as only one element of a wider transitions strategy. Transition activities supported by school district/post-secondary partnerships could include dual credit programs, concurrent enrolment opportunities, occupational pathways, laddering opportunities, as well as awards, summer camps, or contests for different levels of K-12 students. At the program level, transitions can be aided by agreements for dual credit, laddering, preferred entry, or reserved seating in specific programs such as Hotel Management. In a recent submission to the provincial government, BC Colleges called for a BC Colleges Transition Strategy that would, among other things, develop a transition pilot project with K-12, PSIs, and industry to transform dual credit and optimize ACE-IT programs (BC Colleges, 2014).

Alignment: Discussions at articulation committee meetings indicate that there is a need for improved alignment between exit outcomes of secondary schooling and entrance expectations for post-secondary courses, most notably in numeracy and literacy. Articulation committees at the post-secondary level, may provide the venue for better connections between high school courses and post-secondary education through work on standards and alignment within specific disciplinary areas. The numbers of high school students taking and successfully completing first year courses at post-secondary institutions would seem to indicate that determining the sequence of learning from secondary into post-secondary in a common subject area like English is possible and worthwhile.

Individual institutions or regional partnerships could be encouraged to take the lead in aligning specific programs that are outside of the scope of ACE-IT and ITA programming such as in business, health care, computing, or tourism/hospitality. The current revision of the secondary graduation policy in the province and the concomitant revisions to the grades 10-12 curriculum could provide a good opportunity for discussion.

Partnerships: The importance of partnerships is clear in the policy statements of BC, Alberta, and Ontario, all of which require agreements between secondary schools/school districts and post-secondary institutions as a pre-condition for students gaining dual credit, with Alberta also requiring partnership with business/industry under its *Strategy* funding. More explicit support for partnerships in provincial policy may be appropriate in furthering dual credit in BC.

Research: There is still little research and little conclusive evidence of dual credit's effectiveness in Canada or whether success in post-secondary education can be linked to dual credit programming. There are a number of data collection issues, such as the lack of integration across collection protocols and practices and datasets that make it difficult to conduct studies on student progression across the two levels of education. In order to conduct this type of research more data need to be gathered on program participation including such elements as the courses taken, where offered, course completion, graduation rates, GPA, credit accumulated, and PSI credential completion. In moving forward, providing annual reports using provincial statistics would be useful as the basis for further study and evidence-based policy making in the area. Given the strong partnership between PSIs and schools and districts in some areas of the province, a pilot project might establish suitable parameters for more provincial data collection on dual credit activities. One of the more established regional partnerships may be interested in exploring this idea as a pilot project.

Conclusion

This analysis suggests that the model of dual credit in BC has a number of strengths. The policy that governs dual credit is enabling in nature and allows schools, districts, and post-secondary institutions to work out arrangements that meet the needs of their students within a provincial framework. Opportunities for dual credit span the entire system including public and private colleges, institutes, universities, and schools and include high achieving, career oriented, and at-risk students. The percentage of schools, school districts, and PSIs that allow for the granting of dual credit is high in BC, as it is in the rest of Canada and the US although the percentage of students who take advantage of the opportunity is still relatively low. The emphasis on this type of transitional support is expected to grow as the Government of British Columbia

and institutions continue to facilitate transitions from secondary to post-secondary education through initiatives in trades (WorkBC, 2014) and by reviewing high school graduation requirements (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2014). Professionals from the BC school districts, post-secondary institutions, and agencies perceive that dual credit in the province is worthwhile for students and has considerable benefit for institutions, and is generally working well. Many respondents noted current fiscal challenges and stated that success of dual credit programming is dependent on continued adequate funding for programs and facilities.

A number of items offer support for the future of dual credit programs. Within the US literature, there is a wealth of specific advice related to implementation of dual credit programs, especially those focused on at-risk students, as well as three decades of experience with implementation of a variety of programmatic approaches. Alberta and Ontario, with their greater focus to date on career-oriented students, offer useful examples in that area, such as Alberta's use of a grant program to support diverse learner pathways for students, including credentialed pathways targeted to specific occupational areas and the existence of a provincial coordinating committee. In the area of data gathering and reporting, Ontario's detailed policy, program requirements, and reporting structure also provide good examples of the kind of information that could be gathered and reported on dual credit enrolment, retention, success, and credential completion.

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Acknowledgements

BCCAT

BC Council on Admissions & Transfer: 709 - 555 Seymour Street, Vancouver, BC
email: info@bccat.ca   tel: 604 412 7700   fax: 604-683-0576   websites: bccat.ca   educationplanner.ca   bctransferguide.ca