

## **The Beauty of Online College Credit Programs for Students.**

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This morning, February 25<sup>th</sup>, I was listening to a program on Oregon Public Broadcast concerning the soaring costs of college tuition and the insurmountable debt that many college graduates face when they enter the work force. These tuition costs are so daunting, that many students are forming coalitions to rebel against banks and a student's inability to negotiate interest rates on student loans. Some twenty-year olds will be paying back their student loans for years to come and many have monthly payments that equate to house payments (Rao, np).

Setting up our college graduates to face this sort of future seems to work against an American notion of creating contributing citizens. Rather than incorporating these students into the current global market to help stimulate growth, we are delaying this growth by forcing them to pay back thousands of dollars in student loans while working jobs that might not pay enough for them to live above the poverty level. They are unable to stimulate economic growth as they use their income to pay back debt (Rao, np).

Dual credit options in high schools offer kids a fighting a chance. Because students at the high school level can begin to earn their degrees before taking out student loans, their loans become far more manageable when they do enter college and subsequently graduate. When the loans are manageable and far less daunting, these students see more hope and purpose behind the earned degrees and they begin to feel that the education was worth the time and money.

Not only does dual credit give these college-bound students a step-up by securing college credit for them before they enter the university system, but it helps support their future success in college. When students take dual credit at the high school level, they are being challenged to perform college level work at an early age. According to a study by the Community College Research Center, 67% of students who take dual credit courses in high school go on to pursue a higher degree at the college or university level in comparison to 50% of the students who don't take dual credit courses ("What", np). Also many more students who take dual credit in high school continue to succeed in their college classes in comparison to students who were not given this opportunity.

Not only does dual credit offer a higher success rate at the college level, it also gives many minorities a chance to attend a university when they might not have been given that chance otherwise. More and more of our low income students are taking these dual credit courses because they are affordable, and they speak of hope in

higher education to a population that might not otherwise feel this hope (“Community,” np).

As a teacher of dual credit at the Metro East Web Academy, I see so much benefit in offering these online courses to our students. They prepare them for college, they give them hope for a future as a contributing member of society, and they offer the possibility that perhaps debt won’t be an overwhelming challenge that these students will have to face when they do graduate from college. Even though our courses are online, we follow the exact curriculum and syllabus that the college instructors follow; we use the same materials, the same requirements, and the same guidelines. All of our teachers have masters degrees within their area of specialization and are qualified to teach these classes. A rigorous submission policy is in place through our local community college by which the online dual credit courses are analyzed and vetted. We believe strongly that this option for kids is sending more of them to college and making more of them successful when they get there.

Alabama, Florida, and Michigan have laws in place requiring all K-12 students to take an online course. Again, because so many colleges are offering online courses, students need to know how to navigate the online systems so they are prepared when they get to college (Sheehy, np). By offering online college credit courses, we are not only preparing students for the online college world, but we are requiring them to do college level work at the same time. These are rigorous and challenging courses that require intrinsic motivation from the students, the ability to navigate an online learning management system, and the skills to work with others in a virtual environment, which has become a norm on many university campuses.

Maintaining the option to earn dual credit at the high school level for all students is fair and equitable. Our school has many at-risk students who might never have received this opportunity in a different setting. We believe that we are creating college-bound students who have been prepared and challenged with rigorous online college classes. We feel that our students deserve this opportunity.

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