

**College of Liberal Arts and Sciences**  
**Challenge and LINK High School Programs**  
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To: The Accelerated Learning Committee  
From: Sally Hudson, Director PSU Challenge and LINK High School Programs  
Date: March 2014

Dear Committee Members,

As the Director of two high school programs at PSU and a member of the Dual Credit Oversight Committee, I have a keen interest in the area of accelerated learning options. I've been able to attend most of the committee meetings and as the discussion moves forward, I thought it would be of value to share some best practices and hurdles we've encountered with PSU's 37-year old Challenge Program-- Oregon's oldest, and only nationally accredited, dual-credit program.

Challenge was modeled after Syracuse University's Project Advance; its overriding mission has always been to provide students with a substantive and authentic college experience. The standards established by Project Advance became the basis for the standards set forth by the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP).

### **Best Practices: The Challenge Program**

*Keep focused on the goal:* Challenge is committed to providing students with a substantive and authentic college experience.

*Engage Academic Departments from the start.* The Challenge Program was approved in the Faculty Senate, where it was also agreed that it should remain within an academic unit. Initially this was under the Provost; now the Program resides within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, under which are housed the majority of the Departments that participate in Challenge.

All curricular governance belongs to our Departments, which holds them accountable for the credit they confer. The administration's respect for this approach enables Departments to trust the integrity of the program and the rigor of the courses. To facilitate collaboration, Challenge meets at least annually with its faculty participants as a group and informally throughout the year.

*Institutionalize and routinize ways to connect faculty and high school instructors to build partnership relationships and a culture of collaboration.*

- Every high school instructor in Challenge has a faculty partner who is that instructor's primary contact in the Department. They meet initially to go over syllabi, review textbooks, understand grading scales and share assessments.

Faculty partners visit the high school classroom once a quarter/semester and will contribute to the class in whatever way the partners have decided would be most valuable (guest lecture, work with small student group, read portfolios). Challenge pays faculty partners a small stipend for class visits.

- Along with faculty partners, we have a Department coordinator who is responsible for creating two professional development workshops within the Department for the instructors and faculty partners in their discipline. These include a lunch to which other faculty members are invited in order to extend the relationships within the Department. The workshops reconnect instructors to their content area and build a supportive professional learning community. This connection to a Department underscores an instructor's identity as a PSU adjunct, which can support that instructor's ability to create a college culture in the classroom.

***Hold teachers and students to a college standard.*** These are college courses, not college prep. The University's primary job is to deliver a college course as closely as possible to the campus course; the school's primary job is to get students ready for accelerated learning opportunities (long before forecasting into Senior Year). Challenge offers catalog-listed general requirement courses that exceed regular high school curriculum, primarily in History, World Languages, Math, and English.

***In most cases (depends on the teacher and the course) reserve participation to Seniors.*** Seniors are more likely to be ready developmentally and academically for college courses. Younger students are the exception, not the policy and some courses are more appropriate than others for them (e.g., computer science and math vs. humanities). Focusing on building strong foundations and high expectations helps ensure success once credit is involved. (See "Is Faster Always Better?" from the Feb. 21 Chronicle of Higher Education)

***Build a college culture.***

- Require a majority of the class to be enrolled for credit. Current practice is often to partner a dual credit course with AP or IB, but this can dilute the experience of each of these accelerated learning pathways. The notion of something for everyone is good in theory but has resulted in a "pay for credit" mentality rather than a college course identity. Challenge has a requirement that 60% of the class must enroll for the course to be offered.
- Get classes to campus. These are emboldening experiences for our students, as they learn to navigate comfortably and envision themselves as full-time college students. To facilitate campus visits, Challenge helps with the logistics and planning, and reimburses the school for the substitute teacher and for transportation costs. Visits often include a welcome by faculty partners and a

library session where students learn how to use research tools. When visiting classes are small enough, students can sit in on the equivalent campus class.

***Require evidence of readiness.*** We want students to succeed. Until our schools have the necessary support to provide careful advising and a clear academic pathway, self-selecting into courses can be a setup for failure. As a measure of readiness, Challenge students are required to have a 3.0 cumulative GPA (which we think is a better indicator of work ethic and effort than an exam score). We recognize that there are exceptions to this and have a waiver procedure.

***Charge some kind of program fee.*** It is not sustainable or necessary for college courses to be made available for free to everyone. A fee, however small, that corresponds in some way to campus costs (e.g., the part-time admissions fee or a small percentage of tuition) is appropriate, underscores the value of the course, and offsets the cost. That said, there needs to be a scholarship system to ensure there is no case in which a qualified student does not have access to these programs due to cost. Interestingly, when Challenge first introduced a fee, enrollments increased.

### **Hurdles to a more comprehensive dual credit strategy**

***Authenticity:*** There is a reason why concurrent enrollment credit is not accepted by many universities and colleges across the country (including in our own backyard – Willamette, Lewis & Clark, Puget Sound, Whitman). Uneven quality and a concern that these courses cannot really be substantive, authentic college experiences are not unfounded. Being clear about what constitutes a college course, what academic and cultural outcomes need to be met, and holding to these standards in the face of enormous pressure to generate credit, is getting harder and harder to do.

***Funding:*** We need to focus on building expectations, skills, and academic capability *from the very beginning* to ensure all our students are on a successful path. With our 40-40-20 goal and limited funds, how can we best leverage costs to meet this goal?

***Teacher Eligibility.*** We need to grow our pool of eligible instructors. One way would be to work with our teacher training programs and Department faculty to incent new teachers to pursue graduate work in their content area, and work with faculty *across institutions* to develop certification criteria for teaching specific courses within a discipline (e.g., Syracuse University's Project Advance conducts a mandatory 1-2 week Summer Institute to train new instructors to teach specific courses after a pre-screening process; this may be a model to investigate).

***Roles and Distinctions between universities and community colleges.*** As we look at a more comprehensive dual credit strategy, we need to define distinctions between these

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institutions, including differences in funding and areas where we can collaborate and leverage efforts.

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Concurrent enrollment programs have the potential of being the most inclusive and providing the most authentic college experiences for our high school students. They can and should play a major role in meeting our 40-40-20 goal. With an eye toward credit as an outcome of learning, we have a wonderful opportunity to do this thoughtfully and collaboratively. We might want to think about inviting a NACEP board member to provide a wider lens into what has worked and not worked on a national scale, particularly as NACEP is so committed to data. I'd be happy to facilitate this.