Academic Partnerships to Strengthen College Credit Plus

Robin Dever
Kent State University Geauga

Since the shift from Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) to College Credit Plus (CCP), administrators at local school districts and universities have struggled to implement new policies. At one regional campus where the number of CCP students had dramatically increased, the need to find solutions for the challenges and issues that had arisen was urgent. Personnel at a local school district collaborating with personnel at this regional campus identified the challenges faced at both sites, categorizing the problems into four areas: (a) program administration, (b) guidance and advising, (c) curriculum and (d) law and finance. Solutions to each of the problems were discussed, and procedures have been enacted to ensure success for all CCP students. Additional steps were developed to keep open the lines of communication among those involved and to lay the foundation for future relationships with school districts.

The face of the college classroom has changed. When one looks around a contemporary college classroom, the chances of seeing high school students there are high. These students participate in the College Credit Plus (CCP) program, instituted in Ohio during the 2015–2016 academic year. The change from Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) to CCP has resulted in many modifications to policies and procedures for both local school districts and neighboring universities. The revisions that accompanied the implementation of CCP created new challenges for both institutions in the following areas: (a) program administration, (b) advising and guidance, (c) curriculum, and (d) law and finance. Administrators at one regional campus sought to find solutions to the challenges by opening up lines of communication with a school district.

Background Information

In the state of Ohio, high school students have long had the opportunity to enroll in some version of a dual credit program. Since 1989, the dual credit program in Ohio called Post-Secondary Enrollment Option allowed high school students in Grades 11 and 12 to earn college credit and

high school credit concurrently. In 1997, the program was expanded to include students in Grades 9 and 10. Nationally, similar programs during the 2010–2011 academic year resulted in 1,277,100 high school students completing at least one college course while still in high school, including approximately 30,000 public high school students in Ohio. Although this number appears substantial, it represented only 5% of the total number of eligible students (Ohio Board of Regents, 2014).

While evaluating the success of the PSEO program in Ohio, state officials, including the Chancellor and Ohio Board of Regents, studied college readiness and completion, seeking ways to strengthen high school curricula and find better ways for students to prepare for success in college and the workforce. One of the many changes made was the creation of pathways for students to earn a bachelor's degree in three years following high school graduation. In order for them to complete this pathway, college credits must be available to them during high school. These credits can be earned by taking college courses located on a traditional college campus while still enrolled in high school or by having a college course taught on the premises of the high school by a teacher authorized by a university. The PSEO program was underused for this purpose and exhibited varying degrees of "efficacy and quality" across the state (Ohio Board of Regents, 2014); thus changes were needed in the PSEO program. In addition, transparency surrounding funding was lacking, and insufficient information was available to parents regarding the program. Schools offered too few dual credit courses taught by qualified instructors.

Upon reviewing this information, the Chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education along with representatives of numerous special interest groups met and made recommendations to change the structure of dual enrollment; the College Credit Plus program was the result. The change took place with the passage of House Bill 487 in 2014, officially renaming PSEO as College Credit Plus as of the beginning of the 2015–2016 academic year. The program was changed from a "dual-enrollment program" to an "advanced standing program" (Ohio Legislative Service Commission, 2014). One of the most important changes involved finances and outlined clear and specific formulas for funding, including the funding of textbooks.

With the changes from PSEO to CCP, including name, method of funding, and age of participants, university and local school district personnel were challenged to learn the new policies and implementing the

required changes. Many regional campuses became the connecting body between school systems and universities. Even before the changes took place, regional campus administrators saw an influx of high school students; from 2005 to 2014, enrollment of high school students at regional campuses increased 82.90% with 4,033 high school students enrolled in 2014. Comparatively, the number of high school students enrolled at main campuses increased 129.50% during the same period; however, the total number in 2014 was 4,760, not many more than at regional campuses (Ohio Department of Higher Education, 2016). While these increased appeared substantial, they still only accounted for a small percentage of high schoolers in Ohio, in fact, those totals equated to approximately 1% (Ohio Department of Education, 2017).

Benefits of CCP. Despite the changes, programs called dual enrollment or PSEO or CCP all have the same goal: clearing the pathway to college for high school students by decreasing the cost of earning a college degree and making college courses more available to all students. Doing so includes financial and academic considerations. High schoolers' enrollment in college yields many benefits to the students. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2004), a student who earns college credit during high school reduces the time necessary to complete a degree program and is more likely to graduate; in addition, completing college credit in high school reduces the likelihood of dropping out of college during the first year. Of students who remained enrolled in college during 2002 in Ohio, the graduation rate of students who earned college credit in high school was 70% as compared to 53% for all students (Knowledge Works, 2007). Students who earned college credit in high school also completed their bachelor's degrees in less time. Sixty-four percent of dual enrollment students completed their degrees in four years or less compared to 44% of all students. An increase in the number of students earning degrees faster than students in general can also contribute to lowering student debt upon leaving the university because their local school districts are required to pay the college tuition and purchase textbooks for courses taken while they are in high school (Ohio Legislative Commission, 2014).

Adding to the benefits of programs like CCP is the increase in human capital for the state, nation, and global community. The skills acquired when earning a college degree can fill the needs of employers and in turn be advantageous for the greater health of the community. Students who acquire skills and secure gainful employment can support themselves and a

family and enhance the economic value of the community in which they live (Wilson, 2016).

Challenges of CCP. Although a substantial number of benefits come to students and the broader community when young people participate in CCP, challenges are also evident on programmatic and theoretical levels. The first of these challenges is access to CCP programs. The highest student participation occurs in large, urban areas, suggesting that students in smaller, rural areas have less access to such programs (Harper, 2015). The issue of access is further highlighted by variable participation based on students' socioeconomic status (SES) and race or ethnicity. White and Asian students of high SES constitute the largest group of participants (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Another challenge arising from CCP is funding. Local school districts are expected to pay the cost of tuition and textbooks (Ohio Revised Code, 2014), so financial officers struggle to create a budget to support students in the program despite the lack of increase in state funding to supplement the additional expense (Wilson, 2016). The challenge emanates from the funding of CCP by state monies allocated to school districts and then redistributed to postsecondary institutions for tuition, resulting in school districts receiving less money from the state. In addition, universities do not receive amounts equivalent to total tuition rates: They receive a percentage of that fee, causing stress on both districts and universities and creating a tense environment surrounding CCP (Harper, 2015). In 2005, the estimated cost to the state of Ohio for PSEO was $19.3 million (Knowledge Works, 2007), an amount expected to increase because the formula for funding has been modified and more students enroll in CCP.

Program Description

In order to meet the perceived challenges faced at both entities, a program was developed to focus on the partnership between a local school district (LSD) and the regional campus with the highest number of its CCP students enrolled. The primary purpose of this program was to open channels of communication among university administration, university faculty, university advisors, high school administrators, and high school teachers and guidance counselors. The secondary purpose of this program was to identify challenges experienced by the LSD and the university with the implementation of CCP and to develop practical solutions. Grant funds

were awarded by the Cleveland Foundation to support the dialogue required.

Participants. At the outset of the program, a core group of participants was identified at each institution. The university members included an administrator; representatives from student services, including those who advise CCP students; and selected faculty members who teach courses with a high number of CCP students. The team from the LSD included guidance counselors, various teachers who could potentially teach CCP courses either at the high school or on the university campus, the high school principal, and district superintendent.

In addition to these participants, two consultants were asked to serve on the team, one with in-depth knowledge of school law and finance and the other, a faculty member from another campus with expertise in adolescent development, high school curriculum, methodology, and best practices. These consultants were available to educate the team on these areas and how they can influence the outcomes of CCP.

Preliminary data. To begin the program, the core group of members felt that the key issues surrounding CCP were insufficiently defined. Numerous informal conversations had taken place on campus regarding these perceived concerns, yet nothing had been officially documented. To gather necessary information, open-ended questions were sent to all participants via an online survey method. These questions included the following:

1. What questions or concerns do you have about Ohio CCP?
2. What are the three biggest challenges you see with CCP?
3. What role do you think the university should play in CCP?
4. What role do you think the LSD should play in CCP?

Themes emerged from the responses to questions on the survey and were placed into the following categories: (a) program administration, (b) advising and guidance, (c) curriculum, and (d) legal and financial issues.

With these categories in mind, the first meeting was held to explore these issues further and identify steps to create solutions to the problems. During this meeting, participants were asked to pinpoint specific challenges in each category. Once these challenges were presented, each category was assigned a point person to serve as the expert on its content and facilitate solutions throughout the program.

Challenges. All participants identified numerous challenges they faced in implementing CCP. To facilitate working through possible solutions,

the issues were classified into four broad categories, the first of which was program administration. The major question in this category involved the nature and degree of benefits for all those engaged in CCP. Each group expressed concern that their institution received no benefits from CCP but that the other institution reaped all the benefits. Participants from the LSD felt that the university benefited by gaining a higher number of students enrolled along with the accompanying tuition collected; those from the university expressed their perception that the LSD benefited from low cost tuition for their students while taking away seats in courses typically filled by students paying full tuition. Although each group perceived the other institution as the winner in the situation, all participants expressed frustration in feeling that they were on the side losing the most. One participant responded that the most challenging aspect of CCP was "making sure the school districts are not being taken advantage of [having to pay for college tuition]." Another participant responded that the greatest challenge was that "it financially hurts [the] district." By contrast, one responder addressed this issue by questioning the intent of those students coming from the LSD and then answered the question by stating the need to make "sure that students who enroll in these classes are there for the right reasons (not just trying to take shortcuts)." These responses demonstrate that each side perceived the other as the major challenge in the situation.

The next issue concerning program administration for which many sought clarification was the procedure that high teachers needed to undertake in order to be authorized to teach a CCP course either at the high school or on the university campus. Many participants from the LSD were unclear on the requirements required by the state of Ohio and the method to communicate with the university to obtain approval. On a district level, they were unclear about how teaching a CCP course would affect their teaching workload as defined by their union contract and whether or not they would be required to convert an existing course to a CCP course or whether they would create an entirely new course specifically for CCP. Finally, questions from the high school participants arose concerning teacher salary and whether or not they would be paid in agreement with the LSD pay scale or through the university at the rate of an adjunct instructor.

By far, the largest group of concerns was related to advising and guiding of students. The first of these addressed the process of advising. Participants suggested that university advisors hold office hours at the high

school to simplify the process. Next, concerns were raised about the lack of coordination between high school and university scheduling, especially during the summer; for example, CCP students enrolled in summer courses at the university sometimes wanted a schedule change, which required a signature from their high school guidance counselor, who was unavailable in summer. High school guidance counselors and university advisors perceived the miscommunication among the student, high school people, and campus personnel as a major challenge. Both sides sought solutions to simplify the process and place more ownership on the student.

Issues regarding specific courses were also of concern to the participants. Specifically, they raised questions about the lack of information available to explain the prerequisites for courses and how course equivalencies were established. The lack of understanding related to the transferability of courses to different universities was also presented. Attempting to express a concern about finding methods to help students understand whether they were personally ready to take on the rigor and challenges of a CCP course while reflecting on their academic abilities, maturity, and sense of personal responsibility, participants asked the following question: "How do we assess emotional readiness?"

The third category of concerns addressed the curriculum of CCP courses, including determining the content of these courses as well as maintaining the rigor of the courses taught at the high school. Some university faculty members expressed fear that the rigor they have in their classroom would be compromised in a high school setting. One respondent answered a survey question by stating, "I believe one of the main concerns . . . is whether CCP classes are truly being taught at the college level. When they are taught by high school teachers on site in their own classrooms, I think it would be very easy to slip into typical high school teaching." Similarly, participants from the high school were concerned about the courses offered on campus. Both the high school teachers and administrators raised concerns over aligning these courses with the Ohio Learning Standards.

Although these faculty members were concerned about how the expectations of a college course would be controlled in a high school setting, they were also concerned about how to meet the needs of adolescents while enrolled on campus. Questions concerning teaching materials with mature, adult themes also arose. Faculty members wanted to know whether and how they needed to modify their course content to be

sensitive to the CCP students' levels of maturity. In addition, participants questioned if parents of CCP students needed to be aware of adult themes addressed in course content. One participant asked, "Parents of younger students may not appreciate their child being exposed to certain topics in certain classes. Do we plan to educate parents regarding this possibility?" They were also unsure of teaching methods that were best suited for the developmental levels of CCP students. Several felt the need for professional development for faculty, especially adjuncts, on how to meet these needs.

The fourth and final category of concerns addressed issues related to the law and finance. One participant asked whether or not university faculty would be required to undergo a background check completed because they were interacting with minors. Another question regarded clarification on how FERPA rules were different for CCP students in their course as opposed to those who were not minors. One participant asked, "Are all faculty educated as to how they are protected legally should an incident with a student or parent occur? Does CCP alter any of the legal protections for students and faculty?" Participants asked multiple questions about the cost of textbooks to the LSD and voiced dissatisfaction that this cost was a responsibility of the LSD and not the student. They also sought clarification on the overall expense of CCP to the LSD and university. These four categories of challenges were the basis of program participants moving forward to seek solutions.

Outcomes. To address all the concerns raised by the participants in each of the categories, a multipronged plan was created. Individuals with expertise in each area were consulted on how best to address them. Participants decided that a variety of activities was warranted to best meet these needs.

The first planned activity was a meeting held on campus for all participants from the LSD along with staff members from Student Services and campus administrators. The agenda was divided into the four identified categories of concern. To begin the session, a campus administrator discussed with the participants from the LSD the approval process to teach a CCP course and also informed them of the pay rate. The next and largest section of the meeting was devoted to concerns about advising and guidance. One outcome was the creation of a multilayered timeline that overlapped deadlines for the guidance staff at the LSD and advisors at the university and the requirements of CCP students. In addition to the master schedule that was created, a contingency plan was discussed in the event

that a course approved by the LSD for a CCP student was closed by the time she or he registered for it at the university. From this conversation emerged a plan to handle CCP students' schedule changes during the summer while LSD guidance counselors were unavailable to approve them.

On a larger scale, participants discussed the possibility of university advisors holding office hours at the LSD during peak registration times to eliminate potential miscommunication among students, advisors, and guidance staff. In the future, the university advisors will contact the LSD to set up dates for office hours. In addition, university advisors will set up specific dates to visit the LSD and administer placement exams for all interested students. On scheduled dates, all students interested in CCP will be able to take their placement exams in a computer lab at the high school while the university advisors are available for advising.

The next category related to the curriculum, specifically the concern that courses taught at the high school were not held to the same level of rigor as those taught on the university campus. A solution was to assign each CCP teacher at the high school a university faculty mentor in their specific discipline from the university. The mentor could provide guidance on setting up the syllabus, understanding university objectives for the course, and creating and evaluating assignments. Specifically, the university faculty could co-assess key assignments to model the level of proficiency expected at the college level.

In response to the concerns raised by university faculty concerning appropriate teaching methods to use with adolescents along with how to teach mature themes, a special session for faculty was offered during the back-to-school meeting. A consultant from another campus with expertise in adolescent development and methodological approaches was brought to campus to facilitate the session. A discussion was held about the various ways that an adolescent differs from a traditional college student and how CCP instructors on the campus can consider differences in their teaching. Specifically, a conversation was held about how best to teach mature themes to CCP students without compromising the content or integrity of the course. To help these faculty members further, four university professors who teach a high volume of CCP students agreed to shadow a high school teacher in their discipline at multiple points throughout the year to familiarize themselves with the high school culture of their students and to help them understand the developmental levels of their CCP students.

Conclusion

This program was not expected to solve all of the problems related to CCP; however, the groundwork for open communication was laid to establish future discussions and develop solutions. Because of the size of the regional campus and the close relationship that already existed with the surrounding local school districts, opening these lines of communication was relatively easy. LSD personnel worked with a select group of advisors and administrators at the regional campus who had extensive knowledge of their school district and the unique needs of their students as well as the community as a whole. This program remains a work in progress. The importance of the process supersedes the final product. Goals included the following: (a) to clear the pathway for students' success in the transition from high school to college and (b) to facilitate participants' openness to the challenges that arise and the knowledge that solutions are possible by working together.

References

Harper, L. (2015). *Dual enrollment in Ohio: Participation, performance, perceptions, and Potential* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Ohio University, Athens, OH.

Knowledge Works Foundation (2007). *The promise of dual enrollment: Assessing Ohio's early college access policy.* Cincinnati, OH: Author.

Ohio Board of Regents (2014). *College credit plus: Chancellor John Carey's recommendations for Ohio's dual credit program.* Columbus, OH: Ohio Board of Regents.

Ohio Department of Education (2017). *Enrollment data.* Retrived from https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Data/Frequently-Requested-Data/Enrollment-Data/Fall-Enrollment-Headcount-October-2014-Public-Districts-and-Buildings.xls.aspx

Ohio Department of Higher Education (2016). *Headcount enrollment by student level and age.* Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Higher Education.

Ohio Legislative Service Commission (2014). *H.B. 487 Bill Analysis.* Columbus, OH: Ohio Legislative Service Commission.

Ohio Revised Code (2014). Chapter 3365, College Credit Plus Program. Retrieved from http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3365

U.S. Department of Education (2004). *Principal indicators of student academic histories in post-secondary institutions 1970-2000.* Washington, DC: Author.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2009). College and career tables library, Precollege credit. Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:04/09) and the 2009 Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS:09). Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/datalab/tableslibrary/viewtable.aspx?tableid=8886

Wilson, P. (2016). *Ohio College Credit Plus: A policy analysis of two central Ohio public high schools in the first year of implementation* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Ohio University, Athens, Ohio.