

Education Trends

Getting A Step Ahead

Dual Credit Courses, Which Provide Both High School And College Credit, Have Become An Important Education Component

BY DEREK BARTOS
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For the past several years, area high school students have been seeing more and more chances to get a “step ahead.” As partnerships between colleges and high schools have increased, so have the opportunities for dual credit courses. Students taking such classes earn both high school and college credit simultaneously.

“They get out of high school with college courses that will transfer to the school they are going to,” said Lisa Bonneau, Mount Mary College (MMC) associate dean of academic affairs and director of the school’s dual credit program. “The students get to count the course twice, you could say.”

Dual credit courses provide students with many benefits, she said. These include increased experience in college-level work, reduced costs for taking the courses as high school students and more flexibility with college schedules. By not having to repeat the courses in college, students have increased opportunities to take another major or minor, take lighter credit loads or graduate in less time.

Bonneau added that the amount of college credit that can be earned in high school depends on each individual school and class availability, but students can theoretically earn up to 20 hours through classes offered through MMC.

“They can rack up a good number of them if they start early during their junior and senior year,” she said.

MMC’s first partnerships through its “Step Ahead” Dual Credit Program were formed in 1996, and more schools and courses have been added throughout the years. The college now offers classes in English, history, math and science to students at 41 participating high schools. Area schools include Alcester-Hudson, Avon, Beresford, Bon Homme, Centerville, Gayville-Volin,

Irene-Wakonda, Vermillion, Viborg-Hurley, Wagner and Yankton.

Yankton School District Superintendent Wayne Kindle called the partnership with MMC an “outstanding relationship.”

“We are grateful to Mount Marty College and our teachers in the Yankton School District who teach the dual credit courses,” he said.

According to Yankton High School Principal Jennifer Johnke, Yankton currently offers the following dual credit courses through MMC, Mitchell Technical Institute and Black Hills State University: Advanced Placement (AP) biology, AP chemistry, AP history, AP government, AP calculus, AP literature, AP composition, college algebra, anatomy & physiology, welding, computer-aided drafting and machining processes.

The school has increased its offerings in recent years as demand has grown, Johnke said. Last year,

YHS added college algebra, followed by welding, computer-aided drafting and machining processes for the 2014-15 school year, she said.

“Every year, we have a large number of students that take advantage of the courses,” Johnke said. “As we add more available courses, the number continues to grow, as do the opportunities for our students.”

While dual credit programs have been successful thus far, there is one challenge on the horizon — staff availability. South Dakota is currently experiencing a shortage of teacher candidates for many positions, including those that would teach dual credit classes. These teachers require postgraduate degrees.

“It is extremely difficult to attract and hire science, math, and Spanish teachers, and even more difficult to find those teachers who also have their master’s degree in these areas,” Kindle said.

However, Johnke said she was optimistic YHS would be able to continue offering dual credit courses to its students.

“We are dedicated to provide top-notch education to all students at YHS and to pre-

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DR. JENNIFER JOHNKE



PHOTO: METRO GRAPHICS

pare them for their future careers,” she said.

Bonneau said that MMC also recognizes the challenges schools may soon face with attracting teachers qualified to participate in dual credit programs, and the college is constantly considering options to assist with any future needs of its participating schools.

“We’re always looking for new possibilities,” she said. “We’re committed to the dual credit process at Mount Marty and maintaining the relationships with all the schools we have.”

Freeman

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college course, a one- and two-year teacher training course, an academy course, Bible courses, special courses in agriculture, commerce, farm shop and home making; and correspondence work.

The Associate in Arts degree was conferred in Bible, Teacher Training, Commerce and Liberal Arts.

Some courses emerged as particularly popular, depending on the needs at the time, Waltner said.

“The most popular was the teacher training,” she said. There were many rural schools that needed teachers and certification only took one year of study, although some did two years.”

Secretarial courses were also popular, Waltner said.

In the later years, health care emerged as a popular career choice, she said.

“In the mid 1970’s, there was a need for nurses,” she said. “The LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse) program was implemented and did well until the state changed certification and wanted RN’s (registered nurses) with more education.”

Some courses met with varying degrees of success, Waltner said.

“We attempted several different ag and industry-related studies,” she said. “They were well-attended but did not ever really take off.”

In the early years, all Bible classes and many other subjects were taught in German. However, the use of German declined in the homes and classrooms. By 1914, only some Bible courses were taught in Ger-

man. Eventually, German was offered only as an elective course.

The institution operated under a nine-member board of trustees. The board members were elected from a corporation consisting mainly of members from various Mennonite churches of South Dakota and surrounding states.

The name of the school has changed twice since it was incorporated — to Freeman College, and in 1939, to Freeman Junior College.

In its first 50 years, the leadership of the school changed quite frequently. The total enrollment in 1954-55 was 158 — of which 46 were in college and 112 in high school.

A TASTE OF SUCCESS

The campus received a major financial boost with the introduction of Schmeckfest in 1959. The first Schmeckfest was intended as a one-time, one-day celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Freeman Junior College Women’s Auxiliary. The festival featured traditional foods of the community’s Hutter, Low German and Swiss heritage.

Unfortunately, the new “tasting festival” wasn’t prepared for its immediate success. The crowd far surpassed anticipated numbers, overwhelming the event’s organizers. Many visitors left without the ability to sample any of the fare.

However, the organizers weren’t deterred by the disastrous results.

Instead, the FJC Women’s Auxiliary was inspired by the popularity of the first Schmeckfest and repeated the festival in 1960. The event has grown in popularity, attracting thousands of

visitors from across the United States and even foreign nations.

Schmeckfest became a major fundraiser for FJC and remains a major revenue source for the academy. The annual festival — which expanded from a three-day event to cover two weekends — represents a homecoming of sorts for many FJC and academy alumni as well as former residents.

Today, the Freeman Academy Auxiliary organizes Schmeckfest and receives assistance from hundreds of community volunteers. The Schmeckfest proceeds benefit Freeman Academy, affiliated with the General Conference Mennonite Church.

While Freeman Junior College no longer exists, it played a valuable role during its history, Waltner said. The school offered opportunities for area students, including a foothold for attaining higher education elsewhere.

“I believe that at least 50 percent — maybe higher — went on to other education,” she said. “Sometimes they worked for a while and then went to other colleges.”

In the end, more and more students went further away for learning, leading to the end of Freeman Junior College, Waltner said.

“A big factor was just ‘the times,’” she said. “Young folks wanted to get away from the home community for college, and parents were no longer strong influences in these decisions.”

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RTEC

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yet grow that workforce so the cycle continues on and on.”

Yankton Area Progressive Growth is expecting more than 500 jobs to filter into the Yankton area over the next five years, and Svatos said RTEC will be a key to helping support that influx.

“Those jobs are going to require particular skill sets — that’s not a secret,” he said. “They’re going to be high-end manufacturing jobs, so we fit into the picture as another arm in helping train those individuals so they can step into these positions. Or, we’re here to enhance these skill sets and train more people for new positions so that they can continue to fill those workforce voids.”

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