



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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STUDENT FEEDBACK: MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS

The Accelerated College Education Program (ACE) at Corning Community College (CCC) is a concurrent enrollment program, enabling qualified high school seniors and juniors to enroll in college courses and receive both college and high school credit. The ACE program began in 1986, with six participating high schools and an enrollment of just under 150 students. The program since has grown to include 33 high schools in New York and Pennsylvania, with an annual enrollment of approximately 1550 students.

Concurrent enrollment programs are a growing phenomenon across the country, particularly among community colleges. Generally speaking, there are three distinct types of concurrent enrollment partnerships that link high schools with sponsoring colleges and universities.

One type of concurrent enrollment program involves high school students traveling to the college campus to take college courses. A second involves the college professor going to the high school to teach a college course. The ACE program represents a third type, characterized by the fact that the college courses are taught by a qualified high school teacher (in most cases, credentialed as an adjunct faculty member by the sponsoring college) in the high school during the regular school day. This third type is by far the most common.

Many parents, students, high school faculty and administrators, as well as the sponsoring college administration, sing the praises of the tremendous benefits of concurrent enrollment courses. A basic benefit is that students have an opportunity to experience college-level study. Maintaining college-level expectations for content, instruction, and student achievement is a college priority. Advocates of these programs point to

several reasons why concurrent enrollment partnerships are so popular. They

- offer a challenging curriculum to high school students
- enhance high school to college transition
- accelerate time to college degree completion
- provide a college-level learning experience for high school students
- enable students to have a more flexible schedule in college for such opportunities as a double major, exploring other courses, and study abroad experiences, and
- provide transferable credits to four-year colleges and universities.

Opponents of these courses, taught by other than “regular” college faculty, challenge the notion that a rigorous, college-level course can be taught in a “high school student only” environment. An important response to the skeptics and critics from concurrent enrollment program administrators is conducting regular and varied assessment of program outcomes and experiences of high school graduates who took college courses while still in high school. Many program administrators, particularly at the community college level, express concern about the lack of research expertise and financial resources available for conducting program evaluations. However, if program quality and addressing the concerns of skeptics of concurrent enrollment are important, evaluations are essential. A useful amount of information on program effectiveness can be obtained using simple and straightforward questionnaires that are not costly to administer.

Assessment has become increasingly important campuswide, and ACE is included in assessment initiatives. Assessment of ACE courses, instructors, and students is critical for maintaining quality instruction. For example, high school ACE instructors must submit their academic credentials to the appropriate academic division for review before approval is granted. All ACE instructors submit for approval a course syllabus that contains the same critical elements of the campus-based



course syllabi. Each ACE instructor is assigned a faculty liaison as a mentor, and the liaison frequently visits his or her classroom, providing support and feedback.

Student achievement data are considered critical to program evaluation. CCC has implemented a college-wide course assessment plan to monitor student outcomes of course-specific learning objectives for all college courses. ACE courses have the same learning objectives as campus courses and are evaluated with the same evaluation tool.

One of the key assessment tools used to evaluate the effectiveness of the ACE program is surveying ACE students during their first, full-time semester in college. The ACE experience is still fresh in their minds, and they can recall better their assessment of the content and rigor of the ACE courses compared to the courses they are taking during their first semester as a full-time college student. The surveys are sent out late enough in the fall semester to give students the opportunity to have sufficient feedback on how well they are doing in their current courses. The surveys also are sent out to coincide with Thanksgiving break, helping to ensure a better response rate. [Students enrolled in ACE courses also complete the college's standard Reaction to Instructor evaluation, and collected information is submitted to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness for analysis and comparison to regular faculty.]

The ACE Report Card

Of course, many instruments can be used for evaluation purposes, but we have found that our "home-grown" survey, known as the ACE Report Card, provides a wealth of information about students' perspectives on the effectiveness of the ACE program. Some questions include:

- *Of the ACE courses you took for college credit, please indicate:*
 - Yes—if you feel the *content* of the course was college-level
 - No—if you feel the *content* of the course was not college-level
- How would you compare the quality of ACE classroom instruction with that of your present college classes?
 - ACE was better than present college
 - ACE was about the same as present college
 - ACE was worse than present college
- Overall, how would you rate each ACE course that you took in high school?
 - E=Excellent VG=Very Good S=Satisfactory
 - D=Disappointing
- Please share any comments about the quality of ACE courses.

- Did the ACE program meet your expectations?
 - No, Yes, Exceeded Expectations
- About transfer of credits:
 - What college are you attending presently?
 - Please list your first semester college courses by title.
 - Please describe any problems you had transferring credits.
 - Will you graduate from college earlier because of your ACE credits?
 - Will you graduate with a double major in four years because of ACE?
 - Please list any AP (Advanced Placement) exams you took and grades received.

Historically, the response rate to these surveys has been excellent, and students are not at all shy about sharing their opinions. In some cases, students provide their own attachments with additional narratives describing their experiences as an ACE student. We are careful to follow through on any major issues disclosed in the surveys. For example, if a student has difficulty in transferring ACE credits to the college they have chosen to attend, ACE staff will offer to contact that college on behalf of the student and help negotiate the transfer process. Students also use the surveys to provide feedback, both positive and negative, on their ACE instructors. This information is helpful in tracking positive patterns, as well as "red flag" issues, related to instruction.

Keith D. McLaughlin, *Director, Program Development, Florida Community College at Jacksonville (a founding member of the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships—NACEP, and author of the original draft of this article)*

Margaret Heater, *Director, Academic Learning Centers, Corning Community College (NY) (a contributing author who provided current information about the ACE Program's continuing success)*

For more information, contact McLaughlin at Florida Community College at Jacksonville, Downtown Campus, 101 West State Street, Jacksonville, FL 32202. e-mail: kmclaugh@fccj.edu
Contact Heater at Corning Community College, 1 Academic Drive, Corning, NY 14830. e-mail: mheater@corning-cc.edu