

Creation of a Program for First-Generation Dual Credit Students

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Dual credit enrollment provides an opportunity for high school students to experience the college or university academic and student affairs settings, virtually or in-person. One specific population who benefits from dual credit enrollment includes first-generation college students. The development of the “Transition Program for First-Gen College Students through Dual Credit” will allow a cohort of 25 dual credit students from one high school to engage in college readiness opportunities to build their knowledge and potential to continue their higher educational journey with comfort and confidence. First-generation college students are largely hidden on college and university campuses unless they self-identify as first-generation college students, and they require a unique support system to succeed in higher educational institutions (Ward et al., 2012). The program will allow students who are first-generation dual credit students to engage in resources to successfully transition from high school to college.

High schools provide college readiness opportunities for their students at various capacities. Not all first-generation dual credit students are transitioning to higher educational institutions because they may lack support and resources to successfully enroll and register for courses as college students. First-generation college students often can relate to the following statement, “they may feel like frontier explorers who have entered a complex wilderness, equipped with their belongings and a lot of good wishes behind them but largely on their own” (Ward et al., 2012). The “Transition Program for First-Gen College Students through Dual Credit” will allow students to participate in student services opportunities to understand the concepts and processes of the admission, registration, advising, financial aid/scholarship, and residential life programs through thorough presentations. There are trends, which impact a student’s educational journey like the lack of parental support and guidance to understand college expectations and curriculum. The program will help in addressing the lack of parental support as explained, “students whose parents

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did not complete a college degree are less likely to pursue and persist in higher education than their peers whose parents are college educated” (Kiemele, 2020). The idea of the program is to provide resources to dual credit students, so their transition to college will be as smooth and easy as possible.

Student affairs professionals from the dual credit and first-year experience programs will work together to identify 25 first-generation college students who are completing their senior year of high school and put them in contact with an advisor to transition them successfully into the higher education institution with resources to guide their higher educational journey and experience. The advisors will serve as a primary point contact to direct students to the correct departments within the institution. The goal for program outcomes is for first-generation dual credit students to successfully transition to a higher educational institution. Research supports that, “first-generation college students who participate in dual enrollment programs are more likely to pursue and attain a postsecondary degree than their first-generation peers who did not participate in the program” (Kiemele, 2020). The dual credit students will attend several presentations during the spring semester of their senior year. They will be required to attend 1 presentation per month from January to May. Each presentation will be offered in a hybrid fashion through Zoom and in-person options.

There are numerous benefits for dual credit enrollment. Some of the positive outcomes include, “dual credit enrollment opportunities for high school students have consistently shown positive impacts on pursuance, persistence, and completion rates of students in post-secondary education” (Kiemele, 2020). The five presentations will cover topics of 1) admission 2) registration 3) advising 4) financial aid and scholarships and 5) residential life, each topic will be presented by an expert in the respected field from student affairs. The admission presentation will cover the

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details regarding gathering personal information, website navigation, official document attainment and acronyms meanings for terms in higher education. The registration presentation will explain the importance of navigating the course catalog, course schedule and to identify and use the online portal system. The advising presentation will discuss and explain the degree checklist and importance of syllabi for courses. The presentation offered for understanding financial aid and scholarships will cover the topics of FAFSA, merit and non-merit scholarships and interpreting student financial statements. Lastly, the residential life presentation will discuss housing and dining opportunities, social, mental, and spiritual support systems for students. The students will be required to attend the presentations and each presentation will conclude with an evaluation to strategize to improve content provided. Parents or guardians will be encouraged to attend presentations. The goal is to have first-generation dual credit students aware of recourses offered at higher educational institutions.

At the end of the spring semester for seniors in high school, the dual credit program will conduct a focus group with first-generation dual credit seniors and parents or guardians, if available. The questions will be designed to gather information regarding their experiences of the dual credit enrollment opportunity. The questions will provide an opportunity to focus the attention on students to discuss their learning experiences within the classroom setting. As for parents, the questions will be designed to have them explain what specific types of resources they need to help their students transition to college. Family support for first-generation college students is very critical in many aspects, so it's important to have parents or guardians in the focus groups.

The assessment method for the project will utilize the surveys, focus groups and data collection. The surveys will be given to all 25 dual credit students at the beginning of the fall semester of their senior year to gather demographics and pre-program questions. A post survey

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will be provided to students at the end of the spring semester of their senior year. The focus group will be conducted near the end of the dual credit student's senior year in May. The dual credit program will interpret data of seniors from their fall and spring semester to gather completion rates and other integral information to understand the first-generation dual credit student population. The funding sources will come directly from state allocated funding for dual credit enrollment along with external grants, which address dual credit academic pathways for high school students. Dual credit and first-year experience staff will interpret data from surveys and focus groups to understand and improve processes directly affiliated with first-general dual credit students.

The development of "Transition Program for First-Gen College Students through Dual Credit" is to build a change in attracting and maintaining students in higher education, "one of the most significance social challenges facing the United States is increasing the number of students entering postsecondary education and having them persist to degree completion. To accomplish this undertaking, more first-generation college students must matriculate and find academic success" (Loftin, 2012). The goal of the program is to provide all first-generation dual credit students an opportunity to engage in a meaningful experience in college by building a sense of belonging in the academic and social settings. First-generation dual credit students have a greater chance of attaining a college degree.

References

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