

Dual-Credit Instruction and Funding

Dual credit programs are collaborations between high schools and colleges that allow high school students to enroll in college courses and receive simultaneous academic course credit from both college and high school. The funding for the collaboration is shared between high schools (which provide funding for instructional materials from a state appropriation for this purpose) and colleges (which receive I&G appropriations to provide instruction). State law encourages colleges to provide dual-credit instruction tuition free to high school students. Institutions forego more than \$8 million in tuition revenues annually because colleges and universities waive tuition for dual credit students.

Equitable funding remains a concern of higher education institutions. Two-year community colleges, particularly those with the highest levels of state support, give up more than \$6.3 million in revenue for dual credit waived tuition.

Public school districts are funded for instructing high school students at 100 percent, but some of those students are engaged in dual-credit instruction at college campuses. In other cases, high schools have begun providing dual credit instruction for its students with its own teachers, who must hold at least a master's degree, and in other cases, community colleges and school districts have developed early college high schools to offer dual credit instruction.

The system for dual credit is complex, often obscured by the structure and funding of the instruction. Lost in the discussion is the assessment of quality educational outcomes for students, particularly in gaining an academic head start for college. Based on the data, dual credit could be exacerbating the divide among at-risk student populations and students from higher income households. According to national studies, the students who benefit from dual-credit instruction are those from more affluent households.

Dual Credit Enrollment

To graduate from high school, students must complete at least one course in distance learning, advanced placement, or dual credit. The availability of dual credit courses makes it a popular and accessible choice for students over honors, advanced placement (AP), or distance learning courses that are generally geared toward high-performing students or dependent upon available technology.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, dual credit enrollment and completed courses (end-of-course student credit hours) were increasing rapidly on college campuses throughout the state. Indeed, some institutions were growing dual credit activity to fill excess capacity left by substantial declines in college enrollments. Then, the coronavirus pandemic hit, impacting dual credit instruction mostly.

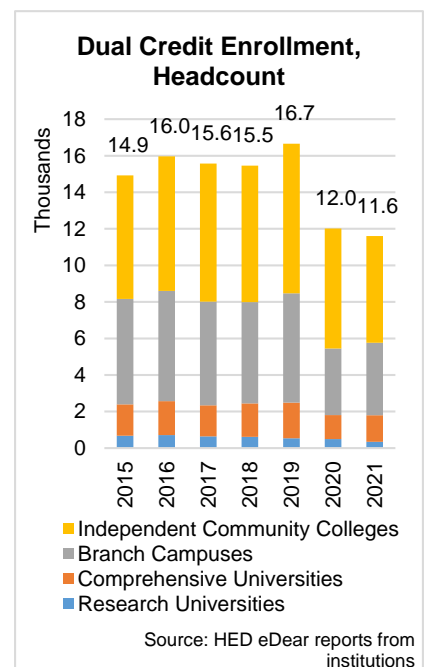
In 2020, dual credit enrollments fell by 28 percent, which persisted into 2021. The rapid decline followed several years of increasing number of high school students taking dual credit. Dual credit is not translating into greater numbers of students entering higher education in New Mexico.

AGENCY: Stephanie Rodriguez, HED Secretary; Dr. Toni Pendergrass, President, San Juan College; Alvin Warren, Vice President, LANL Foundation

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PURPOSE OF HEARING: Funding for Dual Credit Programs

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At two-year colleges, a 15.9 percent decline in freshman enrollment has been most acute at the independent community colleges or two-year branch campuses. The colleges with the most robust dual-credit programs suffer the highest level of decline in freshman enrollment.

Dual-Credit Workload

The college credits earned by dual-credit students are likely lower-level courses. According to data from the higher education funding formula, lower-level courses (freshman and sophomore level courses) declined by 22 percent at comprehensive universities and by 14 percent at research universities. UNM President Stokes remarked at an LFC hearing that the decline of lower-level course completion is an indicator that students are opting for a lower cost for the first two years at a community college or through dual credit.

At community colleges, however, completed courses have declined as well (see Attachment 1). End-of-course student credit hours – faculty workload – have declined by 21 percent over the past five years at campuses statewide. During the same time, dual-credit courses decreased by 22 percent. Prior to Covid-19, dual-credit courses were outpacing the number of dual-credit students, but have since declined proportionally to enrollment.

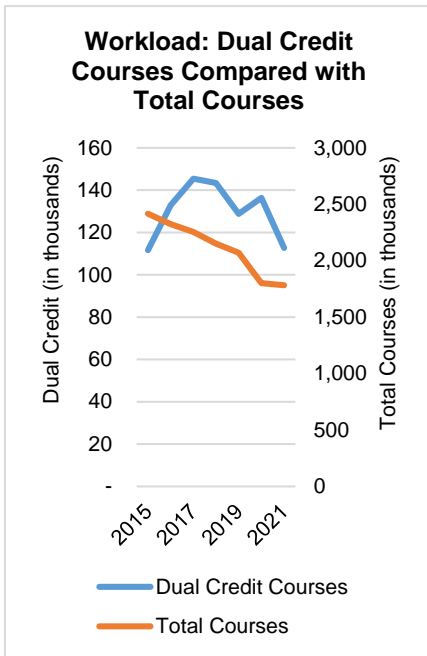
Limited Data on Student Performance

The goal of dual credit is to offer structured opportunities for high school students to enroll in college courses that lead to post-secondary credentials and provide essential job skills. For students, dual-credit is pitched as an opportunity to gain a running start at college, gaining credits, awareness and confidence. However, dual-credit programming is not standardized or transparent across the state and is largely dependent on high school or college administrators' concentrations rather than a defined educational pathway aligned with college degree programs.

Research is mixed on the value of dual-credit programming in closing the achievement gap or improving enrollment or student success at universities. The University of Texas completed a study in 2019 of the efficacy of dual credit programs in Texas. The UT study showed that students entering college with earned credits compared with students without credit did not lower the cost of earning a bachelor's degree. In particular, the study showed no measurable impact on student debt levels, unless students began college with 60 or more dual credit hours. According to the PED/HED annual report, fewer than one percent of New Mexico students have engaged dual-credit instruction at the level to earn the level of credits noted in the UT study.

Students earning 60 credits or more face challenges with federal financial aid, which may be capped at a maximum level of course credits or time. Additionally, in New Mexico, students who complete dual-credit college courses have experienced obstacles with inadmissible credits applied to a degree program, negating the effort to gain a running start for college. Often times, students earn credit in courses that will not count toward general education core curriculum requirements or toward an academic program.

Ultimately, the earned credits, from high school participation in dual credit programs, may not count.



The data framework to characterize the value of dual credit is limited, particularly in terms of improving student outcomes for under-represented students. Colleges and universities lack the systems to track student outcomes for their high-school dual-credit students. The *2020 Annual Report on Dual Credit*, issued jointly by PED and HED, shows that students who have taken dual credit courses graduate at higher rates than the general graduating class. The report, however, lacks analysis to point to the educational attributes of dual credit programming to high school graduation rates.

The annual report shows CNM instructs the highest number of dual credit students, approximately 5,700, far outpacing the second largest provider, San Juan College, who instructed almost 2,000. Combined, four institutions provide 50 percent of dual credit programming in New Mexico: CNM, San Juan College, UNM – Valencia and Santa Fe Community College. The strongest growth in dual credit has been via online instruction, having grown more than 35 percent over the past five years. ENMU – Portales provides the highest number of dual credit programming of all the universities; its largest dual credit course is an online class offered to students throughout the state, who are engaged in agriculture programs such as FFA.

