



College Level English in High School

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College credit for a high school course in English, as well as in other subject-matter areas, has been available for gifted young people in Connecticut for the past four years in the University of Connecticut's Cooperative Program for Superior Students. Manchester High School has offered a "College Level English" course since the inception of the program.

Proposed by the Association of Connecticut Secondary School Principals and accepted by the University Senate in 1955, the program stipulates: (1) teachers recommended by their principals and accepted by the University; (2) students who have been screened by standard intelligence and reading tests and by previous honors grades; (3) a course of study approved by the University. Under these conditions, the University records college credit and the grade given by the high school teacher; these credits are transferable to any other college ready to accept them. The University has a director of the program as a whole and a professor-consultant in each subject area.

Very few colleges have been prepared to accept these credits but many colleges have given advanced placement to graduates of the course—usually after confirmation of the student's ability by

their own test. Manchester students, however, who have elected the College Level English in the past four years have not been greatly concerned with acceleration at college, with the exception of one girl who made sure of it by taking the Advanced Placement Examination given by the College Entrance Examination Board. Motivation for taking the course is, rather, one or more of the following: an interest and competence in English—in most cases demonstrated by having taken "Honors" English in the three preceding years; a desire to have as thorough a preparation as possible for college work; a hope to secure an extra elective course at college through advanced placement.

To resolve the reasonable hesitation of students who feared that their chances for acceptance at colleges other than the University of Connecticut and for college scholarships might be lessened by lower grades than they could get in a regular college preparatory English class, a dual marking system was adopted at Manchester: a "high school" mark and a "college" mark (the two being often identical).

Although Freshman English at the University of Connecticut is set up as a semester each of composition and of literature, permission was given to the high

schools in the program to combine the two emphases if they chose.

Since it was clear that most Manchester students in the College Level course would not be attending the University of Connecticut, a number of courses were surveyed in planning the Manchester course of study. Statements from each professor of Freshman Literature at the University of Connecticut were presented to interested English teachers at a meeting in the spring of 1955. English chairmen from Bowdoin College, Wesleyan University, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (all three already accepting students on the Advanced Standing Plan, from which developed the Advanced Placement Program of the College Entrance Examination Board) kindly sent their syllabi in Freshman English. Courses from the three high schools which had been "pilot schools" in the Advanced Standing Plan were secured. As might be expected, little uniformity of titles existed in the literature courses studied—even those from different professors at the University of Connecticut. A clearer unanimity lay in the expectation of student comprehension of mature literature read in depth and of ability to do abstract thinking.

The Literature Program

The literature in the Manchester course traces a general pattern of intellectual and stylistic development. Unit One, centering on the theme of "The Hero and the Principle of Obligation," includes *Oedipus Rex* and one other Greek play (the choice being influenced in three years by the opportunity for the class to see a Greek play at the University theatre or on television); Machiavelli's *The Prince*; parts of *Beowulf* and *The Canterbury Tales*; *Hamlet* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Unit Two, with the theme of "Conventional and Romantic Values," includes Strachey's *Queen Victoria*; *The Return of the Na-*

tive; *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*; and nineteenth century poetry. Unit Three, with the theme of "The Search for Self-Realization," includes Conrad's *Lord Jim*; Shaw's *Candida*; several short stories and essays; and twentieth century poetry from Housman to Dylan Thomas. Literature read by everyone in the class is supplemented by lecture and by student reports on individual reading, both necessitating practice in note-taking. With each piece of literature, two or three students are usually assigned the responsibility for leading discussion on such topics as: theme development; the characters as individuals and as objectifications of human goals and problems; the function of the parts in the structural whole; the stylistic characteristics of the author.

Written work, averaging a minimum of 500 words a week, varies in type: the development of a topic from class discussion of a novel or play; an explication of a speech or a poem; comparison of a point of view in two pieces of writing; the development of an abstract idea by specific details; extended definition, argument, or persuasion. One long resource paper of 2,000 words or more is done each semester: (1) a first-hand investigation through personal interviews of a community activity or situation such as the work in special classes for the physically or mentally handicapped in Manchester, music education throughout the school system, juvenile problems as seen by the police and by the clergy, and reasons for opposed opinions in local political controversy; (2) a literary resource paper on an author, including discussion of several of his works, his biography, and professional critical opinion of his writing. Hayakawa's *Language in Thought and Action* is the source of written and oral discussion for a two-week period.

In addition to the uniform assignments, students carry on "Individual Work" in each quarter of the year, part

of which is to be reading and part, writing. The reading is often directed to provide the supplementary reports on the period or theme of literature being studied. The writing gives opportunity for the creative students to develop their interest in writing short stories, personal essays, and poetry. A number of the students each year have won recognition for the writing done as individual work, as well as for some of the uniform writing assignments, in the Scholastic Writing Awards program and in local and national essay contests.

Direct vocabulary study is done in connection with practice in taking tests of the College Entrance Examination Board type. A brief review of formal grammar and punctuation is followed by more detailed practice by any individuals showing a need.

The University of Connecticut not only screens the teacher, the students, and the course of study before granting six college credits, but provides a number of valuable services.

Connecticut English teachers on the Cooperative Program meet annually with Dr. Henry Rockel, the University's consultant for English. The evaluation of series of themes written by University freshmen helps to set standards for grading, and these themes, taken back to the high school classrooms, enable students to identify college expectations. Dr. Rockel has graded and commented helpfully upon examination papers written by the high school students.

Dr. Leonard Dean, head of the English Department at the University, has annually made arrangements for Manchester students to visit University classes.

The values of the College Level English course in high school duplicate those of any grouping of superior students, not only in the challenge of a demanding content and approach, but in the intellectual stimulation of one another. The receipt of a college transcript of grades provides a certain satisfaction to the student, even when the transcript has no practical utility. Several students from each class have been able to take advantage of the credits at the University of Connecticut, at four other Connecticut colleges (including, at the end of two years in college, Yale University), and at a very few out-of-state colleges. Many of the graduates from the course have been given advanced placement at out-of-state colleges and have achieved a B or A in that course. The University has begun a study of the college performance of students from all the Connecticut high schools in the program, a study which will provide a worthwhile evaluation of the plan.

Whether or not the course has resulted in accepted credits or in advanced placement or in neither, students returning from college have invariably expressed their satisfaction with the "preview" of college work and with the quality of preparation for college.

Suggested Exercises — and Con

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If all the problems of language arts teachers were placed end to end, the hardy might not be frightened, but they would surely have trouble with the

punctuation. To change the figure—a fortunate device when one lacks sufficient clarity to speak without figures—somewhere in this pile of problems is