

ABSTRACT

The role of the community college is multi-faceted and provides expanded access and opportunities to numerous students at all levels. Post-secondary institutions, primarily community colleges throughout the United States, have recently expanded their partnerships with secondary schools to create opportunities which provide students to be enrolled in college course while still enrolled in high school. These high school students are enrolling in higher education at record rates as they participate in these expanding partnerships. These “seamless” educational opportunities are designed specifically for students at the high school level and are known nationally as “dual credit,” “concurrent enrollment,” and “joint enrollment,” (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). These programs are created to provide high school students wider access to more rigorous academic and technical courses, savings in time and college costs, more efficiency in learning, and enhanced college admission and retention. Providing effective transitioning strategies and programming opportunities like these to students who seek to continue their educational pursuits after high school is of great importance for high schools, two-year institutions and four-year institutions of higher learning.

The objective of the study was to determine if dual credit students at Des Moines Area Community College had similar demographics, within-term course retention, and academic success as non-dual credit students. It also set out to determine the impact of independent variables upon success for both groups of students. The Wilcoxon nonparametric test, Chi-square test and logistic regression were used to compare the students from DMACC’s dual credit population with DMACC’s non-dual credit students entering right out of high school as first-time, full-time students.

Among the findings were: (a) the majority of both groups of dual and non-dual credit students were 18 year old, white males, who were not eligible for pell grants; (b) there were no significant differences in within-term course retention of dual credit students and non-dual credit students when examined by gender, race/ethnicity, or Pell eligibility; (c) there was a significant difference in the success of the dual credit students when compared to the success of the non-dual credit students; (d) there was no significant difference in the success of the dual credit students compared to the non-dual credit students specifically examined by gender, and Pell eligibility; (e) dual credit students had significantly different ACT math scores and 1st semester GPAs when compared to the non-dual credit students; (f) there were five significant variables which had significant impact individually and collectively upon the success of both groups of students. These in order of largest impact are as follows: dual credit English, 1st semester GPA, taking DMACC math, taking DMACC English, and ACT English scores.

The study should be replicated on a statewide basis at the community college level and four year college level, both public and private because of the number of dual credit students transitioning to college. Although there was some information about the enrollment of dual credit students in the state of Iowa previous to the study, there was no formal analysis of the student transition success to college. A qualitative study would also be very beneficial to learn more from the students in order to fully understand the benefits and ways to improve dual credit programming.