

DUAL CREDIT EFFECTIVENESS: **FROM A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE** ALGONQUIN COLLEGE



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to capture the authentic student perspective on their experience in the Dual Credit Program as funded by the School-to-College-to-Work Initiative (SCWI) in the Province of Ontario, Canada. Building on the work of Rudduck and Flutter (2004) student voice was used to achieve a widely supported coherent understanding of the student experience. This study explores the degree of effectiveness through 35 participant interviews and the analysis of 6552 pieces of survey data. Results represent a sampling of the 6000 students who have participated in the program since its inception in 2006. Offered to practitioners are five key findings and five recommendations for discussion.

FUNDING

Commissioned by the Office of Academic Partnerships at Algonquin College in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Accrued funds from the SCWI coordination of the SCWI contract funded this research.

BACKGROUND

In 2005-2006, the Ontario Ministry of Education closely examined why grade 12 high school students were disengaged in their learning. Graduation rates as a result were not at their highest. “The primary focus is on students who have the potential to succeed but are at risk of not graduating from high school, and students who left high school before graduating and are now returning to school.” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) Pilot programs such as the Dual Credit Program were initiated in hopes of re-engaging students by providing them with a new and very unique learning opportunity.

Both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skill Development (formally Colleges, Training and Universities) and School-College-Work Initiative (SCWI) were ...”committed to recognizing in 2006-2007 college courses and apprenticeship in-school training in the approved projects both for credit towards OSSD and the college for students who successfully complete their courses for training.” (Levin, 2007)

In 2006, Algonquin College was one of 24 colleges in partnership with four local school boards to pilot the Dual Credit Program with fifteen students. Students best suited for the pilot were in grade 12 and in Co-operative Education courses. The Dual Credit Program pilot was called “Triple Play” as the program was a combination of two Co-operative Education credits and a college credit.

Today, with added support staff—three Dual Credit Support teachers and Dual Credit Program Coordinator, increased awareness, improvements in communication, flexible scheduling, provided transportation, and the establishment of Team Taught Dual Credits; over 6000 students have participated in the Dual Credit Program.

This research project examined whether or not the Dual Credit Program has been effective over these past ten years through the lens of students enrolled in this program between 2006-2016. Key questions focused on how well the program assisted students to re-engage in their education, graduate and consider attending college. Findings from this research led to five areas of recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

The research collected was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. After meeting with leads from the Ottawa Catholic School Board and Ottawa Carleton District School Board, 35 students were selected from diverse backgrounds to participate in a student interview. Quantitative data was collected through the use of an online survey using the Fluidsurveys.com. A list of students who participated in the Dual Credit Program from 2009-2016 was obtained and an email with an online survey was sent to 6604 students from May 31-June 13, 2016.

Personal interviews and an online survey, questioned students around exploring their experiences into, through and beyond the Dual Credit Program. The scope of the data focused on awareness, experience during the program, overall satisfaction and the pathway of students post dual credit experience.

Personal Student Interviews (QUALITATIVE DATA)

Students interviewed included those who participated in the Dual Credit Program prior to 2016, students who were currently in the program this school year, students who withdrew from the Dual Credit Program and students intending to participate in a Dual Credit Program next year. Students were interviewed from early May to mid-June.

Interviews were unscripted and as authentic as possible. Students were not given the questions in advance. Student interviews took place in locations that were most convenient for the student: on a college visit for team taught dual credits; in their classroom; at the workplace; in school co-op offices; in the guidance office; at their home; at the college before and after their class or during their class breaks. Guiding questions used in our student interviews are in Appendix A.

We made certain students interviewed represented all delivery models available in the Dual Credit Program: Integrated, Congregated, Team Taught, OYAP; represented all geographical areas-rural, urban and suburban; represented unique pathways in SHSM (Specialist High Skills Major), ELL (English Language Learners), Urban Aboriginal and Alternate programs and were from all learning pathways: college, apprenticeship, university and the workplace. Concise student profiles were created.

Online Survey: (QUANTITATIVE DATA)

An online survey was distributed to over 6604 students from May 26-June 13, 2016. These students have participated in the Dual Credit Program between 2009-2016. We had 256 students respond to the survey.

We introduced the research project at a May 2016 PASS Regional Meeting. The support of our school board representatives ensured the online survey had students who responded from all six school boards in our region: Ottawa Carleton District School Board, Ottawa Catholic School Board, Catholic School Board of Eastern Ontario, Upper Canada District School Board, Renfrew County District School Board, and Renfrew Catholic County School Board. Students who completed the online survey also came from a variety of geographical locations, different learning pathways and diverse specialized programs such as SHSM (Specialist High Skills Majors).

FINDINGS

It was imperative for our study; our students interviewed and those surveyed were representative of their diverse backgrounds of the Dual Credit Programs. Through a concerted effort, an authentic student voice could be achieved.

From our conversations and data collected, five themes emerged. Significantly, feedback and shared experiences were very positive.

STUDENT VOICE

“It was a good change. It kept me motivated to stay and work in school. I needed to be with other people with the same interests...good to see new faces other than the same ones from high school every day. *Dylan Rodrigues*

“Experiencing the college life. Not just the courses, but also how other people at college interact. Their mindset is completely different from high school students. It was great to experience that.” *Sven Buljubasic*

“Don’t be worried about if you’re too young to fit in with other college students. You will realize you’re all in the same situation regardless of age. Talk to people and you will meet some great people.”
Online survey comment

“Before the [Dual Credit Program,] I wasn’t to sure of what I wanted to do with my time and career but after [Dual Credit Program] it gave me more insight and options about what I wanted to do with my life.” *Simon Coady*

A. Transitions: Differences between High School and College

Most students stated the Dual Credit Program was a good fit. Although initially some were apprehensive, they were able to adjust and transition into the college culture successfully.

32 of the 35 students interviewed stated their program was a very good fit even if they withdrew. All 35 students commented their Dual Credit Program was a great experience and opportunity.

Several students mentioned the Dual Credit Program allowed them to find out whether or not they should continue their studies in the same area. Many students spoke about how positive it was to be in a more adult like community. The change from high school was needed. Ultimately for many of students, the Dual Credit Program kept them interested in school.

85% of students surveyed strongly agree or agree they were able to adjust to the college level grading. Many students commented they were able to adapt to the differences in expectations, assessment and evaluation, and adjusted to clear-cut deadlines.

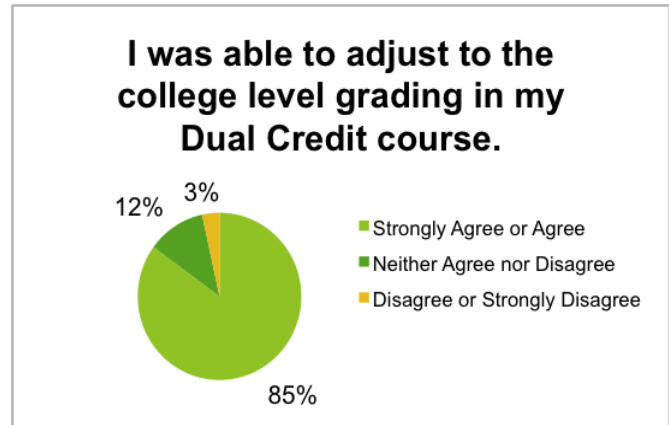


Figure 1 N = 234

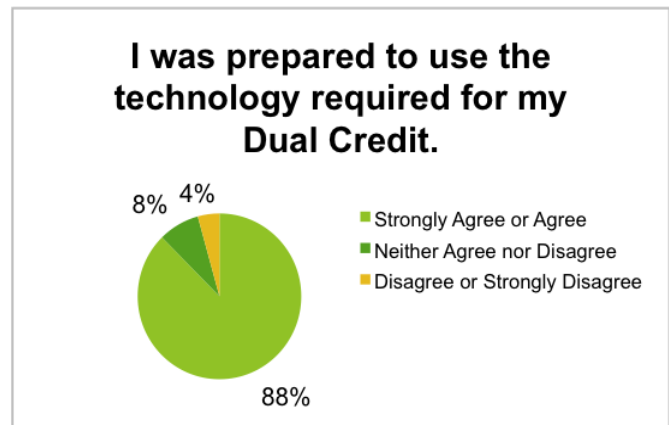


Figure 2 N = 234

88% of students surveyed were prepared for the use of technology at the college. Although some found the pace was faster and workload a little heavier, they were up to the challenge.

Often students mentioned it was important to take advantage of meeting new people with similar interests. Students strongly emphasized to not hesitate to ask questions and for support when necessary.

B. Logistics: Scheduling and Transportation

The majority of students were able to schedule in a Dual Credit Program quite easily into their high school timetable. Transportation was not a concern for most. For some students travel time and a demanding high school schedule made taking a Dual Credit Program at the college most challenging.

The concern was evident when the Dual Credit Program was earlier in the day, and it conflicted with students who had compulsory courses at the same time, like mathematics or science.

When both travel time and scheduling interfered with their Dual Credit Program, our students interviewed told us they had to withdraw from the program.

82% of students who responded on the online survey stated that they strongly agree or agree the transportation process to and from the Dual Credit met their needs. Team-taught Dual Credit Program students did not have any concerns with transportation at all. OYAP students nearly all drove to campus.

The transportation process to and from my Dual Credit met my needs.

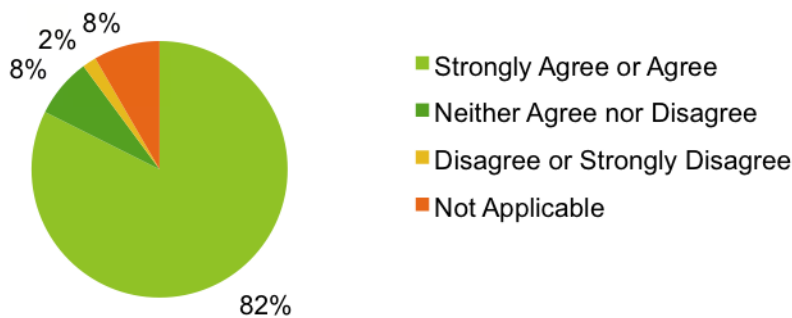


Figure 3 N = 227

The greatest challenges regarding transportation were from the furthest suburban and rural schools. Students from rural areas had difficulty with distance and no access to public transit, even though taxis were provided when necessary.

STUDENT VOICE

“I was taking a math class here at my high school and I was missing the class twice a week because I was at my Dual Credit, so I needed someone to teach me math. I got some math help. I got it at the college. Coming from college to high school was really hard with the transportation. I would prefer to do attend the [Dual Credit Program] after lunch here because it’s easier to get into the class and avoid missing high school classes.” *Fiorella Santos Saenz*

“I had to drop the course because of Mathematics in high school. I was having difficulties keeping up with Math and I needed this course more. Once a week, I missed a full period of my grade 11 Math Course that is a compulsory subject.” *Nimca Farah*

“Transportation was a challenging... long day. It took two hours to get there and two hours to get back. It was my main reasons for leaving the [Dual Credit Program]. The time commitment was too much for a grade 12 student missing class time, and the long hours travelling. It was a very hard decision to drop the [Dual Credit Program] I enjoyed...” *Megan Barbeau*

STUDENT VOICE

“I attended both Orientation sessions. It made me less nervous about going to the college, it calmed my nerves. It wasn't as difficult as I thought. I learned about Blackboard and using the same account. I would recommend all students attend the orientation session” *Simon Coady*

“I know they talked about how it's different from high school, but I think it'd be really helpful to have them explain that it is more responsibility on the student and there are not going to be teachers following them around. Even with Dual Credit, they're pretty lenient... A lot of students didn't expect it to be as independent as it is. It'd be good in orientation, in my opinion, to inform them that they are going to have to take a lot of responsibility and leadership over their own work.” *Ashlyn Bridges*

C. Preparation: Orientation Clarity and Consistency

Many of our students were well prepared for the Dual Credit Program. For those who struggled, some either did not attend the Orientation session due to the time offerings or did not find the information delivered at the session was specific enough.

71% of the students surveyed online attended the Orientation session. About 60% of the students interviewed attended the Orientation session.

94% of students who responded to this question on the survey stated it prepared them for the Dual Credit Program. They liked to meet students from their course, going on the college tour and learning about Blackboard. Students mentioned it made them less nervous about coming to the college and recommended students attend this session.

Team Taught Dual Credit Program students interviewed did not comment about orientation sessions.

The online survey indicated that students would like more information at the Orientation session about supports provided, transportation, computer and network technology, and a tour of the college. See the graph to the right.

Did you attend the Orientation session?

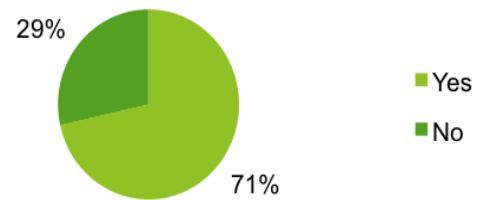


Figure 4 N=235

Do you feel that the Orientation session prepared you to participate in your Dual Credit?

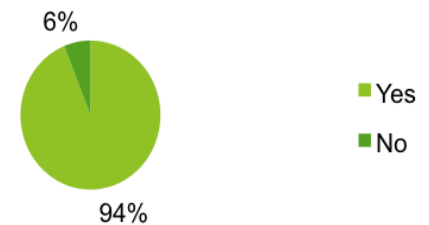


Figure 5 N=179

Was there anything covered in your Orientation that you would have liked to get more information on?

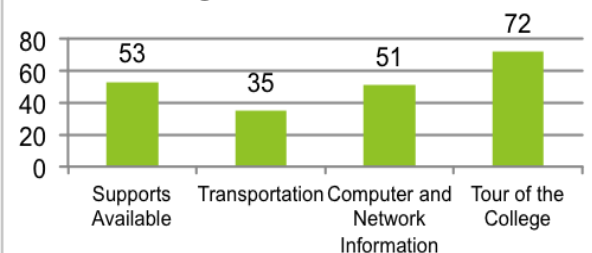


Figure 6 N=131

D. Communication: The Role of Caring Adults

The vast majority of our students spoke very encouragingly about the adults they encountered while in a Dual Credit Program. Support and accessibility was outstanding and readily available. We can never underestimate the importance of good communication and the role the “Caring Adult” plays in this program.

All nine Team Taught Dual Credit students interviewed commented on the positive partnerships between the teacher and college instructor and the transition between both the college and high school course was seamless.

81% of students surveyed online strongly agree or agree when they needed help it was easily accessible.

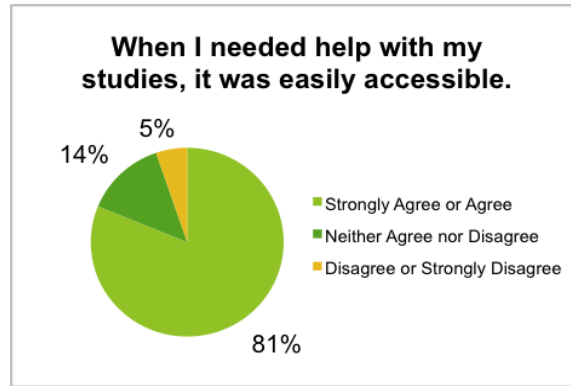


Figure 7 N=229

All students interviewed mentioned how readily available college instructors were for extra help or support via email, phone or before or after class. Many of our students referenced the support and help provided by the Dual Credit Support teacher.

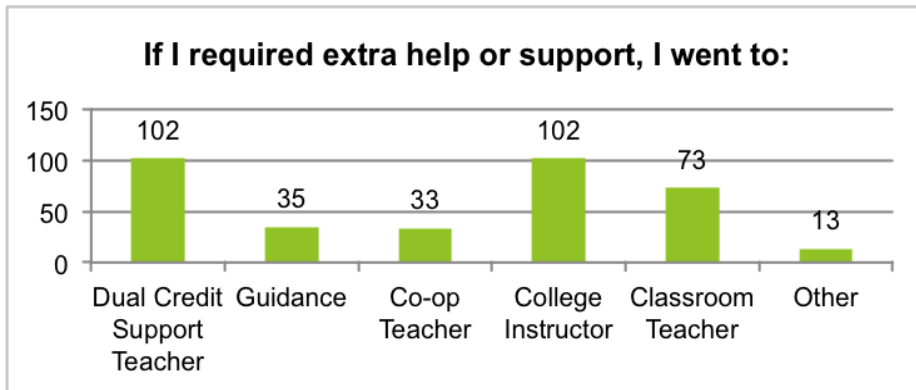


Figure 8 N=229 (multiple selections)

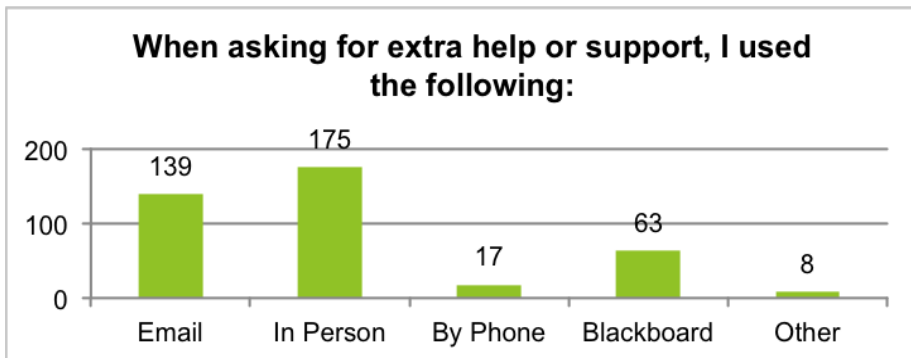


Figure 9 N=229

STUDENT VOICE

“Both college instructor and teacher were always on the same page. Mr. Kelly and Mrs. Wright would always mention each other. I think they had good communication. It was easy to follow.” *Jade Hopkinson*

“It was different having the Dual Credit teacher only in once a week. Because I learn better if something is explained to me in person with their own words, it was slightly challenging for me to adapt, but the professor was always available through phone or email to help me with the work, as were my teachers at school.” *Online survey comment*

“The electrical portion, big part of the [Dual Credit Program]...It was more advanced and it was most challenging. I was a little skeptical. I have a great teacher; he wants me to do really well. He’s been very helpful, easy to communicate with.” *Tom Langstaff*

STUDENT VOICE

“Stick with your course even if you think it is a lot of work! I was frustrated sometimes and wanted to drop the course but stuck with it and was very surprised to find out I already had my English Credit for the program I am now enrolled in at Algonquin!” *Online Survey comment*

“I would recommend my OYAP [Dual Credit Program] because, even if you don’t end up being a mechanic, you can always use this skill in your everyday living. Say something happens to your car – at least you know what’s wrong.” *Johnny Ethier*

“After high school, I went to Carleton for Architecture for a year, left the program. Then I went to Algonquin into Architectural technician (2 year) and the Dual credit- Computer Aided Modelling was helpful for this course. Currently, I am back at Algonquin College studying Building Science Engineering (Applied degree). I just finished my third year. I have one year left.” *Logan Laderoute*

Matriculation: Life after Dual Credit

A substantial number of students chose to attend college or an apprenticeship-training program after their Dual Credit Program. Even for those going into programs unrelated to their Dual Credit Program, the experience was confirmed to be worthwhile.

The students we interviewed and those surveyed online came from diverse learning pathways. 73% of our students surveyed online stated their planned pathway after Dual Credit was to attend college.

79% of our students surveyed online suggested the Dual Credit prepared them for post-secondary education. For those going into the university pathway or workplace, several students stated that learning transferable skills such as note taking, time management, culinary or mechanics skills were all worthwhile.

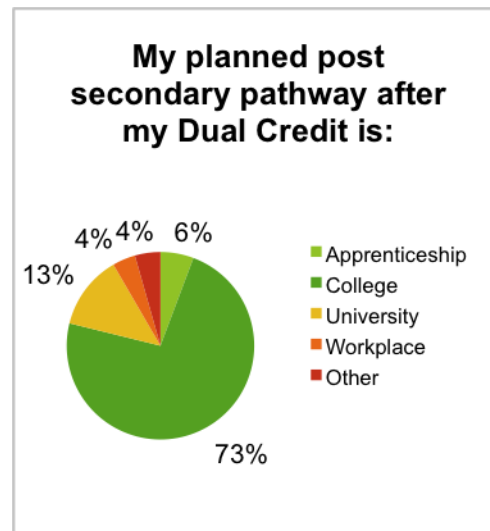


Figure 10 N=227

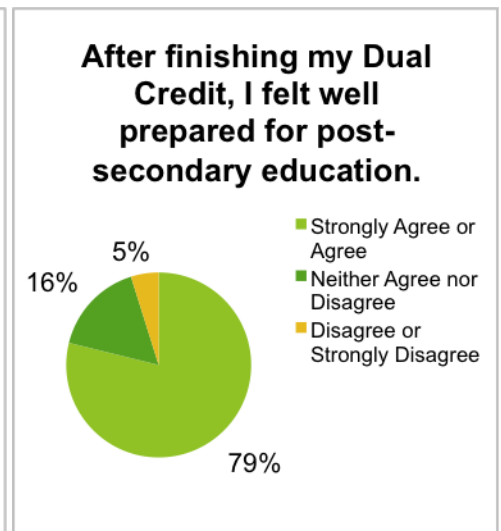


Figure 11 N=227

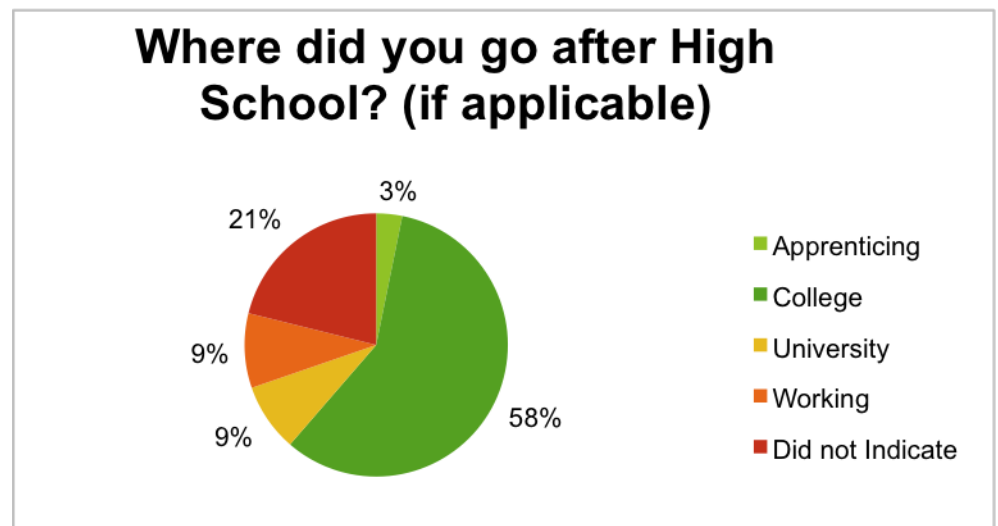


Figure 12 N=251

RECOMMENDATIONS

After thoroughly reviewing the survey data and the findings, five areas of recommendations emerged. It became very evident the former Dual Credit Program students can play a predominant role in delivering the recommendations made both at their high schools and during the Orientation sessions. Areas of focus include:

A: Time Management and Workload

1

We will continue to encourage high school contacts to ensure students are very aware of the impact the Dual Credit Program may have on their existing schedule.

33% of the students from the Online Survey commented their greatest challenge was related to time management and heavier workload. Students that take a Dual Credit Program will have to learn to balance both high school and college courses. Missing class time from high school can be very challenging and therefore support and good communication are vital.

2

In the Orientation session, we are recommending former students discuss what worked best for them to overcome challenges related to time management and workload.

Student feedback clearly illustrated the importance of pre-planning and timetabling for the Dual Credit Program. For some, taking a Dual Credit early the day and having compulsory course is not ideal. Students who planned for their Dual Credit Program well in advance were likely to be more successful.

B: Transitions from High School to College

1

School Boards should consider having former Dual Credit Program students present at their high school during Course Selection or at Course Carousels.

The social aspects of adapting to college were most significant. Again, speaking with students who have been through it may be most helpful.

2

Former Dual Credit Program students should present at the Orientation session and share how they overcame the social challenges while attending Algonquin College.

21% of the students commented that their greatest challenges were associated with the social aspects of college such as being anxious or nervous about coming to college, meeting new people, doing group work, being the youngest, adjusting to a much larger environment and being intimidated by college students. While this is all part of the process, we need to consider how we can address these concerns to ensure all students are more comfortable with this part of the transition process. As the data indicated, not all students attended the Orientation session.

“ *My best advice would be, even though it may seem scary, don't back down. There's is always help and it's an amazing feeling and opportunity, to take this amazing chance life gives you and accept it with open arms.”*

- Online survey comment

C: Adjusting to the Learning at the College

1

Incoming dual credit students should meet their college professor at orientation so expectations are clear.

This specific student feedback refers to assessment, evaluation and course expectations. Students shared it would be valuable to have a more detailed Orientation session where they would meet their college instructor and students from their program. Expectations would also be more directed to their program.

2

High school dual credit contact teacher should have a detailed meeting with the applicant before recommending them to the program.

22% of students from the Online Survey indicated they were faced with challenges adjusting to college specifically linked to assessment and college expectations.

D: Adjusting to Technology at the College

1

Incoming dual credit students with limited internet access should ensure Algonquin College is aware.

A small minority of students stated they experienced difficulties with Blackboard and the use of online resources such as textbooks. This area needs to be reconsidered at Orientation to meet the needs of all students, especially for those with limited Internet access.

2

Algonquin College must cover the use of blackboard and online assignments as part of the orientation program.

3% students responded that their greatest challenge was related to adjusting to technology, a small minority of our students. Blackboard and using online resources and assignments were specifically identified as difficult. A few students interviewed and surveyed, stated having access to technology from home (rural or living on their own) was challenging.

“ *Completing assignments on my own time, this was hard because I didn't have Internet at home and didn't see my dual credit teacher more than twice a week. So it was hard to get the help needed in person.*”

- Online survey comment

E: Transportation

1

Algonquin College should continue to raise awareness of success for Team-Taught and OYAP programs to rural high schools.

2

Algonquin College should continue to examine the distribution of team-taught and OYAP seats to ensure those who are geographically the farthest have access to the benefits of the Dual Credit Program.

A small number of students mentioned transportation was a challenge. As mentioned in the report, providing Team Taught Dual Credit or OYAP intensive programs opportunities met the needs of many students from rural or suburban schools in our outlying areas. School Boards and Algonquin College should continue to examine the distribution of Team-Taught and OYAP seats to ensure those who are geographically the farthest have access to the benefits of the Dual Credit Program.

The 12% of the students who responded online stated their greatest challenge was linked to travel time and distance. Our challenge is how we can provide the

Dual Credit Program to all students regardless of location. The programs with the fewest challenges in transportation were the Team Taught Dual Credit Program and/or intensive Dual Credit Program such as OYAP. and assignments were specifically identified as difficult. A few students interviewed and surveyed, stated having access to technology from home (rural or living on their own) was challenging.

“*It’s nice to go to a regular class and learn with other students. Alternative school lacks that. I think the Dual Credit Program should reach out to alternative programs more, especially considering alternative schools mainly have young adults interested in postsecondary. It might be a struggle for some, but overall it would be a positive experience.*”

- Samuel Jones

CONCLUSION

Students who are moving into, through and beyond the Dual Credit Program frequently stated the Program has played an integral role in assisting them to find their passion and to help them attain high school credits to graduate. Consistently, the Dual Credit Program provide the change they needed from high school to re-engage in their learning. Participants indicated overcoming the challenges of changing learning environments; meeting new people and attaining a college and high school credit as such an incredible achievement. Findings align with Watkins work that when “students are made partners in decisions about their learning, motivation and perseverance grow, resulting in new and more in-depth learning” (Watkins, 2009). It is also evident the role of college instructors, Dual Credit Support teachers, classroom teachers, guidance counsellors and/or co-op teachers together provided students with a community and culture that was accessible and caring. Students verified the Dual Credit Program provided the “trust, autonomy and initiative” (Ferguson, 2006) for adult learning experiences to occur supporting them in their own development. 62% of students would take another Dual Credit if given the possibility to do so and those interviewed who had already completed the program indicated unanimously they would all recommend the opportunity to other students.

APPENDIX A

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWS

- How did you learn about the dual credit program? Who did you complete your application with?
- Did you go to orientation? What did you find most helpful about orientation?
- Did you think you were you prepared for the course?
- Do you think the dual credit was a good fit?
- Did it interfere with your usual class schedule?
- Did you require any accommodations? Were your needs meet?
- How was transportation?
- How comfortable were you with the technology aspect of the course?
- What were the greatest differences between high school and college?
- If you needed to communicate with your College instructor, what was the best way?
- Would you recommend that other students take a dual credit? Why or why not?
- What do you hope to do once you've graduated from High School?
- Last say/best advice

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TERMS

Blackboard: is college based educational technology tool to help students learn.

Dual Credit School Contact: The high school teacher who is mostly closely associated with the student taking a Dual Credit. Most likely it would be a Guidance counselor, Co-operative Education teacher, or the teacher Team Teaching a Dual Credit course. That teacher would also be the point of contact with the Dual Credit Support Teacher.

Dual Credit Support Teacher: This is a teacher who has been appointed by the supporting School Boards. They liaise with the college(s) and the school board on a regular and ongoing basis to coordinate program delivery, assist in the selection of students, verify course rosters, and facilitate the dual credit registration and admission process. Their primary responsibilities include: assisting dual credit students in navigating the college environment and accessing college resources and programs, and planning and delivering supports and services for students in dual credit programs, including any accommodations specified in Individual Education Plans.

Dual Credit Program Coordinator: The Dual Credit Coordinator is responsible for the development, tracking and reporting of School-College-Work Initiative (SCWI) funded Dual Credit projects, including Ontario Youth Apprenticeship programs. The Dual Credit Coordinator serves as the main point of contact for internal partners (i.e. College Chairs, Academic Coordinators, Support Staff and Assigned Faculty) and external partners (i.e. school administrators, guidance staff, classroom teachers and school board SCWI project leads), and works collaboratively with partners to coordinate funded dual credit courses and Ontario Youth Apprenticeship programs.

ELL: English Language Learners, students whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario's schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English. These students may be Canadian born or recently arrived from other countries. They come from diverse backgrounds and school experiences, and have a wide variety of strengths and needs.

OSSD: Ontario Secondary School Diploma is a diploma granted to high school graduates in the province of Ontario. A combination of 30 compulsory and elective credits must be attained.

OYAP Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program: Students take Level 1 apprenticeship in-school training from a college professor or instructor and receive additional support

from a secondary school dual credit teacher. The student's achievement is evaluated by the 12 Dual Credit Programs: Policy and Program Requirements college according to its own standards. Students earn credit that counts towards both their OSSD (awarded by the school principal) and their apprenticeship (awarded by the college).

PASS, RPT #9: PASS (Partnering to Achieve Student Success) is one of the 16 Regional Planning Teams in Ontario that were established to support the mandate of the School to College to Work (SCWI) initiative. As the Regional Planning Team of Eastern Ontario, PASS operates as a school/college/community partnership that provides direction, opportunities and support for students exploring educational and career possibilities. As well, PASS offers a venue for teachers, administrators, faculty members and community leaders to collaboratively work to increase opportunities for student success. The PASS partnership consists of three community colleges, Algonquin College, Loyalist College, St. Lawrence College, and nine school boards.

SCWI: School-College-Work Initiative

SHSM: Specialist High Skills Majors let students focus on a career path that matches their skills and interests while meeting the requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). Students receive the SHSM seal on their diploma when they: complete a specific bundle of 8-10 courses in the student's selected field; earn valuable industry certifications including first aid and CPR qualifications; gain important skills on the job with employers.

TEAM-TAUGHT COURSES: Students are enrolled in a course that covers the content of both a secondary curriculum course and a college curriculum course. Courses that are paired must have significant overlap. A college professor or instructor delivers the portion of the course from the college curriculum, and a secondary school teacher delivers the portion contained in the Ontario curriculum course. The student's achievement of the content contained in the college course is evaluated by the college professor or instructor according to the standards of the college his or her achievement of the content contained in the secondary course is evaluated separately by the secondary school teacher. Credit for successful completion of the secondary curriculum course is recorded on the student's OST. Credit for the completion of the college course, if granted, is recognized in a record issued to the student by the college.