

# **Santa Barbara City College Discovers the Missing Link Between High School and College: A Dual Enrollment Freshman Transition Course**

By Kelly Gajewski

An affluent Southern California community with beautiful beaches and colonial Spanish architecture, the Santa Barbara area would seem to be the last place that might have an academic achievement problem. And indeed, a 92.7% high school graduation rate, as achieved by Carpinteria High School in 2009, would be the envy of many school districts (*SARC*, 2010).

An issue lies, however, in the fact that too few of these students actually attend and graduate from college. In an effort to motivate students to put forth a stronger effort in high school and seek postsecondary training afterward, Santa Barbara City College (SBCC) teamed up with the local school districts, Santa Barbara Unified and Carpinteria Unified, to offer a Dual Enrollment Freshman Transition (DEFT) course.

The class facilitates the creation of online 10-year Career and Education Plans that are unique to each of the students' desired career paths, which he or she chooses after carefully examining his or her strengths, interests, and lifestyle requirements. Students discover the tremendous impact that their high school performance can have on the degree of satisfaction or hardship they experience in their lives, so they increasingly value their education. With such personally motivating goals and all the steps laid out to achieve them, they are more likely to successfully complete relevant postsecondary training and live productive, fulfilling lives.

"Santa Barbara City College has always been an entrepreneurial-thinking college with a very 'big picture'-type of leadership," said Dr. Diane Hollems, Dean of Dual Enrollment at SBCC. "The big picture is that if students as young as 14 years of age learn, in an informed way, what they want to do with the rest of their lives, the benefit is not only to those students but to parents, the high school, the college, and the community."

Students are enrolled at the city college and the high school simultaneously and receive three

units on their college transcripts upon completing the semester-long class known as Freshman Seminar, which they attend on their high school campuses. Offering a freshman transition course that also earns college credit has the additional benefit that, not only do students learn who they are and the life skills they will need to achieve their dreams, but they truly begin to see themselves as college students. This increases the likelihood that they will prepare early for college and enroll after high school graduation. Such a program makes great strides toward leveling the playing field for populations currently underrepresented in higher education, as the DEFT program is intended for all students in an entire freshman class.

"Our program is designed to reach all students," asserted Dr. Lauren Wintermeyer, Dual Enrollment Coordinator at SBCC. "We're reaching minority population students that may otherwise not have access to postsecondary education. If we get them experience, and access to people at the college while they're still in high school, hopefully they'll have a more successful transition after high school."

## **A Breakthrough in Dual Enrollment Innovation**

SBCC has offered traditional dual enrollment classes such as English and calculus for a number of years, which were initially attended mainly by high-achieving students. But the college's pioneering in the area of dual enrollment began in earnest in 1998 when California passed new legislation allowing both high schools and community colleges to collect funding for dually enrolled students.

The program has grown to include over 100 dual enrollment sections offered on five high school campuses throughout the school day. With approximately 2,000 students taking a dual enrollment course and receiving college credit from SBCC each semester, SBCC facilitates one of the largest and most successful dual

enrollment programs in the country that schools from throughout California visit and strive to emulate.

Hollems immediately saw the potential of the 10-year plan to powerfully transform the culture of the Santa Barbara area high schools and increase college participation after attending a workshop in early 2009, which outlined the program model of the George Washington University's Freshman Transition Initiative. But she took it one step further: *What if the freshman transition course advocated at this workshop also carried dual enrollment credit? What if every freshman within the college district started high school with this rigorous, standards-based course, completed the course with an online 10-year plan, and earned college credit for it?*

Upon returning to Santa Barbara, she promptly met with the leadership of the two school districts within the enrollment area of SBCC and, through a series of presentations and workshops, recruited the majority of high schools in the area to participate at different levels the following fall. Through the fall of 2011, 1,013 9<sup>th</sup> graders within the Santa Barbara area districts had enrolled in this course to earn three units of college credit for the DEFT course.

"I think if we find more ways to remind them that they're city college students, we'll see even more enrollment in dual enrollment courses, going to the college campus, taking more honors and AP courses," speculated Erin Hansen, teacher of the DEFT class at Carpinteria High School. "If we can get so many benefits from one course, it's absolutely worth our time."

### **Too Many Students are Not College-Ready**

Students enrolling in college are often grossly unprepared for the rigor of college-level work. A U.S. Department of Education study announced that 25% of students entering four-year universities and 61% of students entering community colleges enrolled in at least one remedial class because their skills were not adequate to succeed in entry-level classes (Wirt et al., 2004).

Needless to say, taking remedial courses is an expensive way to enter college for students who must pay for required, non-college level courses before they even begin working on a

degree. They are also costly for taxpayers, who pay for the same education for the same students twice.

Perhaps worst of all, remediation is a devastating roadblock for students on their mission to get a degree. Taking non-college level courses interrupts any momentum students may have, sends them the message that they are not cut out for college, and drastically increases the probability that they will drop out. The Education Department study reported that only 17% of students that take remedial reading, for example, ever complete a bachelor's degree, compared with 58% of students that did not take remedial classes (Wirt et al., 2004).

This occurs in part because high schools are often unaware of what colleges actually want their students to know. A closer relationship between the high school and the community college, which can be fostered by creating a dual enrollment program, brings the different systems into closer alignment to better prepare students for college.

Wintermeyer agreed that communication has been crucial to the success of the SBCC dual enrollment program. "All of us—K-12, community college, university [staff]—are in this partnership together. We're looking at aligning curriculum so that students have a seamless transition between systems," Wintermeyer said.

Too often, educators believe that just getting students into college means that the high school has completed its mission. This is evidenced by the commonly used 5-year plan that ends only a year after students graduate from high school and gives little attention to graduating from college or career choice. This frequently results in students who are unprepared for college and who fail to understand why they are there.

"It seems like everything is always talking about how you get to college and they never really talk about what you do after," observed Sierra Saragosa, a sophomore at Carpinteria High School. "Freshman Seminar really helped me realize that there's life after college and that everything I'm doing now is working for *after* college and not just *for* college."

Students who do not see the relevance of education to their lives are unlikely to even get to college, much less finish.

“Most of the time, when students complete high school, they still don’t have a clear picture of what they want to be or what their major should be,” Hollems commented. “They often hear, ‘Just explore, you have all the time in the world, make up your mind later.’ Well, that doesn’t work and it’s not realistic. But students that come to college knowing what they want to be and having researched that are going to finish. And that’s huge. That’s why we invest in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade dual enrollment course.”

### **A 10-Year Plan Keeps Students on Track**

The freshman transition course serves as an important bridge from middle school to high school and paves the way for a successful transition to postsecondary education or a career pathway. The student discovers how hard it is to earn the extravagant salary she imagined but that it is possible to earn a decent living in a career she enjoys. It then ties a student’s performance in all of her core academic classes to her chances of living the lifestyle she desires and shows her that putting forth her strongest effort in high school is the wisest first step to achieving her goal.

These lessons are especially crucial for students coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may lack resources or role models to teach them the foundations of middle-class success.

“The coursework opens their eyes to the 15 industry sector pathways, the four systems of higher education, financial aid, things they may not have the cultural capital to know about,” Wintermeyer noted.

With a new, more realistic understanding of adult responsibilities and of her own strengths and preferences, the student explores the concepts of identity achievement: who am I, what do I want, and how do I get it. Throughout the course, she builds the self-knowledge and learns the strategies to be able to write her own quantitative 10-year Career and Education plan.

The 10-year plan lays out the steps for each student to get through high school, through postsecondary training, and into his or her chosen career. Even if students decide to change their plans later (as many inevitably will, in

today’s world), they know how to go about the decision-making process.

“Whether or not the students, down the road, continue with the [plans] they created way back in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, they’ve learned how to set goals and they’ve learned how to check on those goals, and hopefully they can look back and see that they’ve completed those goals,” Hollems said.

The 10-year plan also becomes an important advisory tool throughout high school. Carpinteria High School has set up designated “touch points” to check in with students on their progress toward their goals. The online 10-year plans are available anytime a counselor or instructor needs to re-engage students who might be faltering on the path to self-sufficiency.

Having the connection between the high school and the community college extends the length of time that students can receive guidance related to their 10-year plans. Instead of hoping that students will remain motivated and keep their plans in mind through all the ups and downs of college, SBCC will have counselors onsite, trained in using the 10-year plan, who can continue to assist students in achieving their goals.

“We’re not supposed to do it for the students, we’re supposed to empower the students to do it for themselves and I think if we’re all on the same page looking at the students’ own words then we can best reflect that back to them,” Wintermeyer said.

The James Irvine Foundation awarded the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University oversight of the Concurrent Course Initiative (CCI), which had eight grantees in California. Dr. Thomas Bailey, Director of the CCRC, and Dr. Katherine Hughes, Assistant Director, have been performing research relevant to dual enrollment for a number of years and studied the dual enrollment program at SBCC as part of the CCI. The article “Dual Enrollment Can Benefit a Broad Range of Students” by Hughes and Senior Research Associate Dr. Melinda Mechur Karp (2008) confirmed that, when it comes to low- and middle-achieving students in particular, simply providing access to college courses is not enough to observe benefits in increased post-high school college enrollment and attendance. Dual enrollment is most effective with this

demographic when there is a substantial support component, which the DEFT program delivers in the form of the 10-year plan.

“I don’t know that other colleges embrace the bridge between secondary and postsecondary in the same way,” Wintermeyer surmised. “I think, in many areas, students can take courses at the college level but are left to navigate the pathway on their own.”

And students left to navigate on their own are at a much higher risk of getting lost.

SBCC’s dual enrollment program offers a variety of career pathways and academies that feed directly into degree and certificate programs at the college, and having these systems in place helps students know where to go next and how to follow through on their goals. Before the DEFT program, students were still responsible for selecting a career path independently. But as she compares students at Carpinteria High School that have had the freshman transition class with those that have not, Hansen fears that older students at the school will be at a disadvantage.

“I feel it’s a disservice to [the older students] because, through Freshman Seminar, [students] not only know about career pathways but they know practical life skills,” expressed Hansen. “[The older students are] going to be more like wanderers, whereas our freshman classes are going to be able to advocate for themselves no matter what they do because they know what’s out there.”

Luckily for future freshman classes in the Santa Barbara area, they will have all the resources they need to make the most out of their futures.

“When students have a detailed 10-year plan with a clear path to not only economic self-sufficiency but also to a satisfying life that matches their passions, strengths, and personality, the advantages of advanced placement-type courses such as dual enrollment become abundantly clear,” said Mindy Bingham, author of the standards-based *Career Choices* curriculum published by Academic Innovations. This comprehensive guidance course material is the curriculum adopted for use in the SBCC Dual Enrollment Freshman Transition classes.

“Students who might not normally stretch themselves to tackle these college-level courses see the benefits in exerting the extra effort,”

contended Bingham, whose curriculum has been used by over 5,000 schools over the last 20 years. “And *that* intrinsic motivation is the key to dropout prevention, for both high school and college.”

### **Dual Enrollment Increases Access to College**

Dual enrollment increases the probability of post-high school success in college by giving students a taste of what college is like in a dose that is not overwhelming. The DEFT course uses pass/no pass grading to ensure that no student will start college with a poor GPA as a result of the class, but the vast majority of students have thrived in the tough course and earned college credit. This encourages them to think of themselves as college students and proves to them that they are capable of getting a degree.

“Offering dual enrollment to freshmen is a huge self esteem boost,” Hansen affirmed. “You can just see the smiles on their faces—they’re proud!”

Hughes supported this observation in her article “Dual Enrollment: Postsecondary/Secondary Partnerships to Prepare Students” (2010), concluding that:

Briefly, dual enrollment was positively related to students’ likelihood of earning a high school diploma, to college enrollment, to persistence in college, and to higher postsecondary grade-point averages. And, while much dual enrollment occurs through community colleges, participating students in our studies who went on to attend college once completing high school were more likely to enroll in a four-year institution, perhaps indicating that their early taste of college gave them the skills and confidence to raise their educational aspirations. (p.13)

With a college transcript already started and a 10-year plan in place, students show improvement in their preparation for college by taking the classes they need and working hard in them from the start. Through dual enrollment, students learn how they will meet the higher expectations of college and develop the self-motivation that they will need in order to flourish there.

“I think it’s the key to teaching students self-advocacy, how to jump the hoops of

postsecondary education, and the language of postsecondary education,” Wintermeyer said.

Dual enrollment also has the potential to save the student money on college tuition because these courses cost remarkably less than college courses for regularly enrolled students. SBCC, for one, offers dual enrollment courses for free to high school students.

It is cost-effective for the community, as well, because the taxpayers avoid paying for students to take essentially the same classes in both high school and college and avoid paying for classes for students that will change their majors or drop out later. The community also reaps more from students that contribute a larger amount of money in taxes as productive citizens, instead of losing money on dropouts in need of welfare or, in too many cases, incarceration.

“That’s the engine that drives our whole economy: the education of our young people and the education of our workforce,” Hollems asserted. “It all ties in together.”

### **The Results Start to Come In**

The program continues to grow. As of Fall 2011, three comprehensive high schools in the SBCC enrollment area require a DEFT course for all incoming freshmen.

Carpinteria High School led the way for this local initiative. From the start of the program in the fall of 2009, the DEFT course has been required for all 9<sup>th</sup> graders. The semester-long course is paired with the semester-long health requirement so that half the students take the DEFT course in the fall and the other half complete the course in spring. The first cohort of DEFT students is currently in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and school officials report an evident change in school culture over the past three years as this initial cohort and subsequent classes have embraced career and educational preparation.

“Students seem to be more connected to school, are here in the classroom more, and are just not getting in trouble as much,” Hansen reported. “I think that relates to the Freshman Seminar course and what they’re getting from the class—they understand that they need to be here and why their decisions [now] will affect them in the future.”

The Santa Barbara Unified School District, comprised of three comprehensive high schools as well as one participating continuation high school, has also embraced the DEFT course. Dos Pueblos High School has offered three to five sections of the DEFT course each semester since its inception, and La Cuesta Continuation High School has adapted the course for multi-grade level students. For credit-deficient students, this course is particularly important as it assists students in realizing their goals and the necessary steps to get on track academically. Furthermore, the relationship with SBCC Dual Enrollment encourages students to link their educational aspirations to the multitude of programs available at SBCC, particularly those designed to assist underrepresented, first-generation college students.

In the fall of 2011, Santa Barbara High School and San Marcos High School joined SBCC’s *Get Focused...Stay Focused!* movement by implementing the DEFT course. Both high schools offer the course for all 9<sup>th</sup> graders, and the introduction to dual enrollment encourages participation in additional dual enrollment courses and career technical pathways. Beginning with the current class of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, students will benefit from follow-up curriculum in the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades at all of the comprehensive high schools in which they will revisit their 10-year plans and re-articulate their self-directed goals. The local school districts are also discussing the potential for the DEFT course to become a high school graduation requirement, as the need for all students to have a personalized learning plan is indisputable.

Carpinteria High School reports that freshman suspensions have decreased significantly since the program was implemented. In addition, a preliminary study at Dos Pueblos Senior High School found that 10<sup>th</sup> grade students who have taken the DEFT course are absent five fewer days per year than 10<sup>th</sup> graders who had not taken the course. Such results reported by the high schools have spurred SBCC to expand the DEFT program even further.

A recent \$20,000 donation from the Santa Barbara Foundation and community activist Carl Lindros will help compile the data to date. A plan is in the works to raise funds in order to

track students in the DEFT program throughout their tenure at the community college.

**Future Plans for DEFT  
from 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Through College –  
The *Get Focused, Stay Focused!* Initiative  
and the *Progression in Education Model***

In recognition of the fact that the 10-year education and career planning process needs to continue throughout high school, a follow-up curriculum tied to the English Language Arts Common Core Standards and the College and Career Readiness Standards, in particular, is currently in development. Teams of educators representing the local service-area high schools gathered in February 2012 to collaborate on writing and editing a first draft of proposed modules for the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Students spend 16 hours in each grade level revisiting their 10-year plans in an academic classroom. They continue the reflection and revision process by exploring both high-demand and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) careers and connecting their selected career path with an appropriate postsecondary major and institution. Students are encouraged to apply for financial aid, scholarships, and the postsecondary pathway of their choosing, and they improve their career-readiness through the development of resumes and cover letters, mock interview experiences, job shadowing, and community service opportunities.

The curriculum delivers a subtle yet important message: “A productive and satisfying life requires becoming a life-long learner who takes charge of his or her own education plan.” Students will continue to prepare for life after high school, whether it’s in a formal educational setting such as college or in training programs when entering the workforce.

The online 10-year plan is valuable not only for helping each student stay on track to reach an informed postsecondary education goal, but it is also an important tool for counselors and instructors; because it is online, the 10-year plan can help them personalize their work with each student. SBCC hosted an overview workshop entitled *Caring Conversations* for the area’s schools, presented by the Director of the Freshman Transition Initiative at the George

Washington University, Dr. Rebecca Dedmond. Dedmond presented strategies for preparing the rest of the schools’ faculty to use the online 10-year plan for advisory and academic coaching purposes. More work is planned for increasing the advisory capacity on the high school campuses as well as at the city college.

Seeing the potential to take this model to still another level, SBCC is guiding the high schools in developing strategies for summer bridge programs for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, which will give them a head start on learning what it takes to be successful in high school. During the summer of 2011, two schools tested a unique model to address the needs of its distinctive student population. In addition, by the time the first DEFT freshmen cohort reaches SBCC, systems will be in place to enable students to transition their online 10-year Career and Education Plans seamlessly into the guidance system of the community college. This dynamic tool will provide college guidance professionals and faculty alike the ability to actively monitor and support each student’s progress toward a satisfying and productive adulthood.

The program for the ongoing development of Career and Education Plans from 8<sup>th</sup> grade through college comprises the *Progression in Education Model*, a comprehensive, scalable program that addresses the recommendations of the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force in the report *Advancing Student Success in the California Community Colleges* (2012):

*Every Matriculating Student Needs an Education Plan*

Every student who enrolls to pursue a certificate, degree or transfer objective, and in many cases even those seeking career advancement, needs a Student Education Plan that represents the sequence of courses that can get them from their starting point to attainment of their educational goal...

Expanded resources for career exploration are essential. (p. 21)

In fact, the *Progression in Education Model* will be integrated with SBCC’s new *Express to Success* initiative. By “backward mapping” their ultimate educational and life goals via their 10-year plans, students completing *Express to Success* will make informed decisions in

preparation for arriving at the college with declared majors and a solid understanding of the college courses they need in order to complete a degree or certificate program and/or transfer.

Ideally, this cohesive partnership between college and secondary school will save students from accruing unnecessary units, which in turn will help them to evade the cost and frustration associated with a non-directed path. Instead, they will efficiently complete certificate programs or associate degrees and transition to either productive, self-supporting work or to another institution in pursuit of a baccalaureate or other degree.

### **A Crucial Step Toward Educational Equality**

Implementing a dual enrollment freshman transition course is a key strategy to increase college enrollment and graduation among students that are currently underrepresented in higher education. With a semester-long comprehensive guidance course based on the *Course Standards for Freshman Transition Classes* and continual support in the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, any student is capable of writing and following a 10-year Career and Education Plan. Additionally, early exposure to college enables these students to see themselves as “college material” and enhances the odds that they will adequately prepare for postsecondary education, enroll, and graduate.

Without this knowledge, guidance, and experience, students must put all these pieces together by themselves, and if they do figure it out, it is often too late.

“Unless they have parents that are actively involved and sharing this with them,” Hansen observed, “there’s nowhere else on our campus where reality is so embedded in the classroom.”

Dual enrollment freshman transition promotes equal opportunity for all students and, by helping them to plan where they are going, helps them to make the most of their lives.

Voiced Lauren Mingee, a junior at Carpinteria High, “When I was a freshman, I was taking pretty easy classes, doing my homework in the morning, not really trying as hard. After taking [Freshman Seminar], I realized how much applying yourself really matters. Education really matters and the choices you make now

really affect your future. This year I’m taking AP classes and a dual enrollment course.”

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