

Dear Higher Learning Commission,

My name is Sutton Dewanz. I am currently a freshman at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Last spring, I graduated from Windom Area High School in Windom, Minnesota. I was very fortunate because Windom offered dual credit courses. Thanks to these dual credit classes, I actually have enough credits to be classified as a sophomore in college. I recently heard that the Higher Learning Commission hopes to change the guideline pertaining to dual-credit teacher requirements. I still have friends who are in high school, and I think about how sad it would be for them to miss out on the opportunity that I was lucky to have. Only a month into my post secondary journey, I am already reaping the benefits of dual-credit courses taken in high school. Dual-credit is not only an incredible financial benefit, but also a valuable tool when it comes to college preparation.

Thanks to the college classes I took in high school, I entered college with over 30 credits. This saved my family and I thousands of dollars, and now I have the ability to graduate in three years, opposed to potentially four or more. The dual credit program was my only viable option to get a head-start on college work. My school did not offer AP classes like a lot of my peers' schools did. Furthermore, living in a rural area, there was not a college close enough for me to consider PSEO. If the new guidelines are adhered to, many of the high school students attending Windom Area High School will have no other options. As much of a financial benefit as this was for me, it is substantially more beneficial for students from lower income families. Credits earned from dual credit courses may be a crucial factor that affords these students post secondary opportunities which may not have been considered otherwise.

Coming into college, I did not know what to expect. All I had was the several college courses I took in high school to give me a glimpse of what college academics were like. Now that I am settled in, I am able to make comparisons between my University of Minnesota courses and my dual-credit courses. Content wise, they appear to be similar in that I am learning the same content whether I was in Minneapolis as a college freshman, or if I was in Windom as a senior in high school. The difference is in the teaching. My teachers in high school were able to offer me a more hands-on education. Obviously, the teacher-student ratio in high school was much lower, so my teachers were able to give me more attention and time. In contrast, my professors in college are sometimes teaching hundreds of students at a time. When it comes down to it, the content being taught is equal, but the content being retained and understood is not. I think back to the Calculus class I took my senior year. It was hard, but I had a great teacher who did whatever it took to make sure all of her students understood the content. Since I was able to receive dual-credit for Calculus, I do not have personal experience in a Calculus class on campus, but I hear from other students. Calculus is just a professor lecturing to the class, if you get the material, you get it, but if you do not, the professor does not necessarily have the time to cater to individual learners in a lecture/seminar course.

From a financial view, taking the same course in college twice would not make sense. So it does not make sense that high school students would have to take, for example, Microeconomics in high school then go to college and learn the same material. It is redundant. This time could be spent on a different class that advances a student in their college academic plan. Personally, I took Microeconomics and received dual-credit for the course. I was taught by a teacher who was very involved in my learning, and as a result, I finished the class with an excellent understanding of the material. If I would've been forced to sit through the class now in college, it would be wasted money and wasted time. I am not attending college to review knowledge I have already learned, I am going to learn new knowledge. My Microeconomics dual credit course sufficiently prepared me for the Macroeconomics course I am taking now. It was time for me to take the next step up, not spend a semester at the same level.

My experience with dual-credit courses was nothing but positive. It would really be tragic if this opportunity was taken away from high school students. It is such an advantage to enter college with credits, not only financially, but experience-wise as well. My teachers in my dual-credit classes could not have taught me any better, and I am so lucky that not only did I receive a more hands-on and personal education, but I also got college credit for it! The system does not appear to be broke, why "fix" it?

Sincerely,
Sutton Dewanz
dewan028@umn.edu