

Student lends knowledge to national education policy report

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When more high school students in Illinois began taking coursework for college credit, David Seiler was intrigued. The Indiana State University doctoral student and history instructor at Lake Land College noticed that many courses were similar to the ones taught at Lake Land and other two-year colleges.

His piqued interest in such courses led him to play an integral role in writing a national report on dual-credit classes offered across the country.

As one of three student researchers, Seiler worked with lead researcher Victor Borden on "Dual Credit in U.S. Higher Education: A Study of State Policy and Quality Assurance Practices," which was published in May. In the report, the researchers reviewed policies and practices across the country for college credit courses available to [high school students](#). The project, which was authorized by the Higher Learning Commission (a part of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools accrediting organization), is a "snapshot of what is happening" with dual-credit courses, Seiler said.

"It's a mixed bag...," Seiler said of such courses. "The ultimate finding was it's a little bit of everything all over the country."

The commission first wanted a more localized project, but expanded the effort nationally based on the desire of other accrediting organizations throughout the country, Seiler said. The group created a questionnaire

and also interviewed officials in 47 states for the report.

"Although various forms of what we are here labeling 'dual-credit' have been in existence for decades, the recent significant growth of this activity has led to a flurry of new programs and policy formulations," the researchers wrote in the report. "The lack of standards and conventions among states related to this short history includes [inconsistency](#) in basic terms and definitions and the use of multiple terms within states."

People using the same terminology at times need to specify what they mean, Seiler said. In central Illinois, high school teachers lead the dual-credit classes for college credit; while in Massachusetts, it's more common for students to leave their high school to go to the college campus to take classes there, Seiler added.

"Each state's developing" its own system, Seiler said, "and the reality is that within a state, there are differences as well." Indiana State's dual-credit program, College Challenge, is available in more than one dozen regional high schools in and near the Wabash Valley. The program offers high [school students](#) the opportunity to take [coursework](#) at their school for Indiana State credit. More information about the program can be found at www.indstate.edu/challenge.

Seiler's interest in dual-credit classes has grown, as he has seen their popularity expand in recent years. He plans on writing his dissertation on the expansion of dual-credit course initiatives in Illinois. Two-year colleges have noticed some of the difference, as they teach some of the classes that are now offered as dual class offerings to high school students.

"It's got to be rigorous, obviously, so it's not going to be for everyone," said Joshua Powers, associate vice president for student success. "But if we're trying to find cost-affordable alternatives for students, having them

come in with more credits can help to ensure that they will graduate sooner."

Powers had recommended that Seiler apply to be part of the team that crafted the dual-credit report.

"He brought a valuable faculty perspective to it," Powers said. "He's a history instructor, and that brings a nice perspective to the topic that considers the implications of proliferation of dual-credit opportunities as it impacts the academic mission and perceived quality of students' education."

While more students may be encouraged to further their education by taking dual-credit courses as high school students, drawbacks may exist in the quality of education that students receive, Seiler said. He cited the example of dual-credit classes taught by [high school](#) teachers, rather than professors who may require a deeper level of writing and critical analysis.

"If it is a practice that can help more students get college degrees at a better price, then it's a good thing," Seiler said of dual-credit programming. "But if it is not, we have to examine it. If there are negatives, we need to know what those are, and we need to study it."

Provided by Indiana State University

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