

Researchers join forces to study high school dual-credit policy

June 4 2014, by Greta Guest



(Phys.org) —Researchers at the University of Michigan, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Tennessee Department of Education will share in a \$2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to launch a five-year study on the impact of a new dual-credit policy in Tennessee.

The Tennessee policy allows students to earn [college](#) credits for advanced math [courses](#) taken in [high school](#). Dual-credit programs, increasingly widespread in U.S. high schools, are intended to ease the transition from high school to college and also make college more affordable.

"Our study will provide critical information to educators across the United States as they consider expanding these programs," said Susan Dynarski, a [public policy](#), education and economics professor at the University of Michigan and co-director of the Education Policy Initiative at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy.

The study is co-led by Dynarski, Steven Hemelt, an assistant professor of public policy at UNC-Chapel Hill, and Nathaniel Schwartz, director of the Tennessee Department of Education's Office of Research and Policy.

"The transition to college is often rocky, with most students required to take remedial math. Dual-credit courses promise to smooth this transition by exposing students to rigorous, college-level math," Dynarski said. "This study will show whether this approach works, and for what kinds of students."

The study will use a randomized, controlled trial approach, with more than 100 public high schools across the state of Tennessee randomly assigned to a treatment or control group. Students in schools in the treatment group have the opportunity to enroll in re-designed dual-credit courses.

High school teachers in treatment schools and college instructors of the same course such as college algebra meet during the summer prior to the school year to better align the high school and postsecondary versions of the courses' curricula. Students in these re-designed courses have the

opportunity to earn credit at any of Tennessee's two and four-year public colleges, based on their performance on an end-of-course exam.

Researchers will track students through high school and into college and look at how the dual credit policy affected their enrollment in other high school math classes and how it influences their college choice, enrollment in remedial courses, major and other measurements.

"There have been numerous anecdotal stories praising the ability of dual-credit courses to improve transitions to college, especially for low-income and traditionally disadvantaged [students](#)," Hemelt said. "Yet there is sparse causal evidence that confirms, denies, or qualifies such theories. Our study fills this important void."

Researchers expect to present the first year results in fall 2015.

"The results from this study will provide actionable feedback to Tennessee officials, allowing them to improve, in real time, the rollout of additional, dual-credit courses," Schwartz said. "Our results will contribute [policy](#)-relevant evidence to nationwide discussions of how to smooth the transition between high school and college."

Provided by University of Michigan

Citation: Researchers join forces to study high school dual-credit policy (2014, June 4) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-06-high-school-dual-credit-policy.html>

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