Examining Access and Attainability to Higher Education through Dual Enrollment Programs

As dual enrollment programs increase nationally, it is important to examine the impact and purpose of these head-start opportunities. Research on the topic has been sparse, especially pertaining to college access/attainability for low-SES students. This roundtable posits engaging dialogue surrounding overarching national issues while examining Nevada's system and programmatic levels.

In response to the national dialogue surrounding dual enrollment programs, this roundtable discussion aims to examine dual enrollment programs nationally and at a state-level while highlighting the gaps in the existing literature. Grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), original qualitative data will be collected from each of the seven institutions within the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) for a cross-case analysis. An important goal of the roundtable discussion will be geared toward stimulating positive academic discourse surrounding the access and attainability of dual enrollment programs for low socioeconomic high school students.

Dual enrollment programs across the country cite varying purposes for the existence of their programs. Commonly cited purposes include providing high school students the opportunity to earn college credit and gain a head-start to a college degree without delaying their high school diploma completion time, exposing students to a collegiate environment and university life (e.g., culture and expectations), challenging students with the rigor of college-level curricula, and creating a more seamless pathway from high school to higher education (Drew, A., 2010; Karp et al., 2007; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003).
Variations of dual enrollment programs are often linked to the expectations, requirements, and policies of the individual high school, school district, post-secondary institution partner, and state (Cassidy, Keating, & Young, 2010; Drew, A., 2010; Karp et al., 2004). More specifically, programs may vary by instructors (e.g., high school teachers, college professors), locations (e.g., classrooms in high school or college campus), entrance criteria (e.g., grade level, GPA requirement), financing (e.g., subsidized by the state, students pay full sticker price of tuition and fees), student mix, credit earning, and intensity of the coursework (Karp et al., 2004). Bailey and Karp (2003) classified dual enrollment programs into three types: Singleton Programs, Comprehensive Programs, and Enhanced Comprehensive Programs. Singleton programs mostly refer to programs where high school counselors help coordinate high school students enrolling in regular college courses that are not modified for high school students. Comprehensive and Enhanced Comprehensive Programs offer a more holistic approach that most often encompasses an incremental plan to earn dual credit while receiving extensive guidance, support, and resources (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Cassidy et al., 2010).

In contrary to the research base on the well-established Advance Placement program, dual enrollment programs are considered understudied (Karp et al., 2007; Wyatt, Patterson, & Di Giacomo, 2014). In a 2004 publication for the U.S. Department of Education, Adelman published a foundational, national longitudinal study that examined descriptive variables (“principle indicators”) of traditional-aged high school student cohorts and subcohorts that included 22,500 12th graders (1972-1986), 30,000 10th graders (1980-1992) and 25,000 8th graders (1988-2000). Information was gathered on these cohort members leading up to the ages of 26-31. Adelman examined the students’ used of post-secondary credits earned through dual enrollment and credit-by-examination. Although Adelman’s study presented many insightful findings, the most broadly impactful finding related to those students who persisted to complete their bachelor’s degree. He found the more post-secondary credit earned through dual enrollment and/or credit by examination, the more likely the students decreased their time-to-degree (Adelman, 2004). Adelman also found that “gaps in basic postsecondary education by race/ethnicity have narrowed, but gaps remain wide by socioeconomic status” (2004, p. 99).

Most research since Adelman (2004) has been limited to institutional or institutional-system studies (Wyatt et al., 2014). This research has initially painted a favorable picture of the effects of dual enrollment programs. Compared to students who did not participate in the programs, dual enrollment students have a higher likelihood to attend a four-year institution, are more likely to be familiar with the college environment, are less likely to have declined grades from high school to college, are more likely to achieve postsecondary academic success, and are more likely to persist through college (e.g., Blanco, Prescott, & Taylor, 2007; Drew, A., 2015; Karp et al., 2005; Wyatt et al., 2014). Smith (2007) suggests that dual enrollment programs have a positive relationship with educational aspirations when controlling for student personal factors and parental education level. Flores and Park (2013) found that taking rigorous courses in high school (i.e., trigonometry and/or AP/IB courses) and participating in dual enrollment programs were factors that predict access to college.

The demographics of students participating in dual enrollment programs provide clues to the access and attainment of historically low socioeconomic populations. An (2011) determined that dual enrollment participation influenced the success of students in their first year of college and that “low-SES [low socioeconomic] students benefit from dual enrollment as much as high-SES [high socioeconomic] students” (p. 407), although participation did not explain increases in GPA or reduced need for remediation. In a second study, An (2012) describes that low socioeconomic students’ participation in dual enrollment programs does positively impact the likelihood of degree attainment, although this would only “modestly reduce gaps in degree attainment” (p. 1).

Recent studies have also indicated demographic changes in the composition of programs in some states. Young, Slate, Moore, and Barnes (2013) found that community college dual enrollment programs in Texas met with shifting populations from the 2005-2006 to 2011-2012 academic years, with Asian students increasing from first to last, in terms of participation numbers, followed by White, Hispanic, and Black students, factors that may tie to socioeconomic impacts of these programs.

Nevada Dual Enrollment Programs

NSHE is comprised of seven colleges and universities which consist of two research intensive universities (University of Nevada, Las Vegas and University of Nevada, Reno), one comprehensive four-year college (Nevada State College), and four community colleges (College of Southern Nevada, Great Basin College, Truckee Meadows Community College, and Western Nevada College). Every one of the NSHE colleges and universities have high school students dually enrolled, whether through an official dual enrollment program (e.g., Early Studies Program, Early Start Programs) or independently as a non-degree seeking student (NDS).

Roundtable Objectives

For this roundtable discussion, the authors will provide an overview of national dual enrollment program types, trends, and purposes with an intertwined theme of access and attainability for low socioeconomic high school
A brief overview of CRT will be provided to serve as the overarching theoretical lens during the dialogue.

The objective of this roundtable is to foster meaningful dialogue regarding:

- Growth and trends of national dual enrollment programs
- Dual enrollment challenges in access and attainability for low socioeconomic students
- Findings of access and attainability within and across NSHE dual enrollment programs
- Potential solutions for increasing access and attainability for low socioeconomic students in dual enrollment programs

Theoretical Framework Guiding the Discussion

The authors utilize CRT as the guiding theoretical framework for the discussion. Calmore (1992) describes CRT as "a form of oppositional scholarship" that "challenges the universality of white experience/judgment as the authoritative standard that binds people of color and normatively measures, directs, controls, and regulates the terms of proper thought, expression, presentation, and behavior" (pp. 2161-2162). From the Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) case to the modern day common mission of institutional diversity, underpinnings of CRT can be found within our colleges and universities. CRT gained prominence following the Civil Rights Movement when researchers sought to understanding experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination from more enriched, encompassing perspectives. Because of the desire to maintain movement following the social progress of the 1960s, and with the input across multiple disciplines, the emergence of CRT research in the 1970s can also be considered activist in nature (Brayboy, 2005; Tate, 1997; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Some researchers suggest that CRT must be viewed alongside gender and class discrimination in order to understand its full complexity, as topics of diversity cannot be viewed from solely one perspective (Solórzano, 1998; Tate, 1997; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were the first researchers to apply CRT to education (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). As Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) describe, “CRT offers insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogies that guide our efforts to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom (see Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Tierney, 1993)” (p. 63). They further detail that “the critical race theory framework for education is different from other CRT frameworks because it simultaneously attempts to foreground race and racism in the research as well as challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of color. Further, it focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of communities of color and offers a liberatory and transformative method for examining racial/ethnic, gender, and class discrimination” (p. 63).

Within higher education, CRT has been used as a framework for many different studies, with samples of just a few mentioned. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) use CRT as a lens to examine the impact of microaggressions on African American students and the larger impact on campus racial climate. Solórzano, Villalpando, and Osegua (2005) examine the K-20 educational pipeline for Latino/Latina students, with implications in a CRT lens. Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, and Parker (2009) described the experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders through the CRT framework. Derivations of CRT have even emerged as scholars more closely tailor the focus of their inquiries. For example, Bernal (2002) examined Latino/Latina critical race theory, or LatCrit, in her comparison of Eurocentric and Chicano/a educational experiences. Brayboy (2005) applies TribalCrit in his study of Indigenous Peoples within the United States. Considering these higher education studies using CRT, the authors anticipate that examining the impact of dual enrollment programs - and emphasizing the areas of access and quality for historically underrepresented groups within higher education through CRT - could provide insight that contributes to the existing body of work.

Data Collection, Evidence, and Resources

Currently, no peer-reviewed studies exist examining the dual enrollment programs across NSHE. By exploring the participation and impacts of these specific programs, the authors hope to gain additional insights into the impacts of dual enrollment programs in an increasingly diverse ecosystem.

This study is designed as a multiple case study, with dual enrollment programs at each institution within NSHE acting as a single case. This methodology allows for within and cross-case analysis, which helps the authors discern differences and similarities in mission and results (Yin, 2009). Interview questions focus on access and attainment, with groundings in the lens of CRT. Interviews of program coordinators and students as well as analysis of key documents (i.e. program memorandums of understanding, marketing materials, and assessments) are the primary sources of evidence.
Strategies to Facilitate Participation

We will facilitate discussion regarding the implications of two distinct types of missions of dual enrollment programs, through the lens of CRT, by using several tools. First, a one-page handout will be prepared to frame the discussion, with a brief summary of the seven institutions. A matrix of characteristics of the seven institutions, with detailed specifications for each of the programs, will be completed which will inform roundtable participants of similarities and differences of the programs and their missions and requirements. Some initial questions that we intend to ask to facilitate the discussion are as follows:

What surprised you regarding the overview of national dual enrollment programs?

In your opinion, why are dual enrollment programs under-researched?

What are the most daunting challenges facing low socioeconomic students interested in dual enrollment programs?

Who is primarily responsible for addressing dual enrollment access and attainability (e.g., K-12, colleges/universities, policy makers)?

What opportunities can you identify for NSHE dual enrollment programs?

Importance of the Topic

Despite the national increase of dual enrollment programs and the conversations surrounding their appeal, research on such programs is substantially underrepresented in the both K-12 in higher education literature. Further, the authors are not aware of any studies that have been published on dual enrollment programs among and within NSHE. The authors are further interested in the access and attainability of NSHE dual enrollment programs for low-SES students.

Conclusion

In closing, dual enrollment programs play an important role in the transition from high school to college of an increasing number of students each year. Research on the topic, especially as pertaining to access and attainability to college for low socioeconomic students, has been sparse. The use of the CRT framework is a novel way to approach potential implications of these programs. This roundtable poses the opportunity for engaging dialogue that will encompass an overview of national issues and an example at a state and programmatic levels.

Attached File

Reference(s)


Kim, J. (2008). The impact of dual and articulated credit on college readiness and total credit hours in four


