



More Than 17% of Acceleration Courses and Exams Taken Do Not Result in College Credit, Which Costs State Almost \$6 Million

at a glance

Approximately 17.5% of the acceleration courses and exams successfully completed by Florida high school students do not result in college credit to a state university or college, with Advanced Placement exams the least likely to transfer. This occurs for four reasons:

- some students complete multiple exams that result in the same college credit;
- some students do not submit documentation of exam scores or dual enrollment grades to their university or college;
- state and institutional rules limit the number of high school acceleration credit hours for which students can receive college credit; and
- some state universities and colleges fail to award appropriate college credit.

The state spent approximately \$5.8 million on high school acceleration courses that did not transfer for college credit for students who entered college in 2005-06. If these students retook these courses at universities and colleges the state would have incurred an additional \$2.3 million in costs. The Legislature could consider options to reduce these costs.

Scope

As directed by the Legislature, this report reviews whether state universities and colleges award appropriate college credit when Florida high school students successfully pass eligible acceleration exams and courses. This report is the third in a series of reports on acceleration programs in Florida.¹

Background

Florida has established several programs to enable high school students to take acceleration courses in order to broaden their curricular options, increase their depth of study in particular subject areas, and reduce the time it takes to earn a college degree.² Students who pass these courses and exams are eligible to earn college credit that may be used toward degree requirements.

Acceleration programs may benefit both students and the state. By allowing students to earn college credit while in high school, the programs may reduce the state's higher education costs by enabling these students to graduate from college faster and freeing classroom space for other students. Florida offers four categories of high school acceleration programs.

¹ *Student Participation in Acceleration Programs Has Increased; Legislature Has Taken Steps to Reduce Program Costs*, OPPAGA Report No. [08-70](#), December 2008; *Modifying AP Incentive Funding Could Produce Significant Cost Savings*, OPPAGA Report No. [09-12](#), February 2009.

² Section 1007.27(1), *F.S.*

Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered in 55 Florida school districts and through Florida Virtual School, and prepare students to pass national subject matter exams.³ Students who earn requisite test scores on AP exams at the end of the year are eligible to receive college credit (students may also take these exams without enrolling in AP courses). In Fiscal Year 2007-08, 129,779 Florida high school students were enrolled in AP courses.

Dual enrollment courses allow high school students to simultaneously take and earn credit for high school and college courses without having to pay college tuition. Students must pass the course to earn college credit. Each of Florida's 67 school districts have partnered with colleges and universities to offer these courses. In Fiscal Year 2007-08, 35,323 Florida high school students took dual enrollment courses.⁴

International Baccalaureate (IB) programs are available in 27 school districts. The IB program is an intensive two-year curriculum that allows students to earn an IB diploma in addition to their high school diploma. Students who take an IB course examination at the end of the school year are eligible to receive college credit. In Fiscal Year 2007-08, 9,802 Florida high school students were enrolled in IB courses.

Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) was recognized as a state-funded acceleration program in 2002. Offered in 14 school districts, the program provides advanced courses based on an international curriculum to students in grades 11 and 12. In Fiscal Year 2007-08, 2,171 Florida high school students enrolled in AICE courses.

The State Board of Education and the Board of Governors established the Articulation Coordinating Committee to serve as an advisory body for developing and implementing statewide articulation policies and the statewide articulation

agreement.⁵ The committee identifies the minimum scores students must achieve in order to receive college credit through the AP, IB, and AICE acceleration programs, and the maximum credit hours and the course or courses to be awarded by public postsecondary institutions. These guidelines are intended to be minimum standards for awarding college credit and institutions may award additional and different credit for these exams if it is in the best interest of the student. Students receive college credit for dual enrollment courses according to the guidelines of the Statewide Course Numbering System.

As noted in our 2008 report, the percentage of students qualifying for college credit through acceleration programs has decreased over time, falling from 71% in 2002 to 64% in 2007.⁶ This decline reflects the increased enrollment in these courses, which grew by 8% over this period; some of the increased enrollment represented students who were not as prepared to succeed in these programs. See our 2008 report for more discussion on this issue.⁷

Program funding

Funding for high school acceleration programs is allocated to school districts through the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). In addition to basic student funding, the Legislature also provides incentive funding to school districts for students passing AP, IB, and AICE exams. Districts may use these incentive funds to pay for the AP, IB, and AICE exam fees and required teacher bonuses. In addition, students who participate in dual enrollment programs with Florida's community colleges and universities are also included in the community college or universities' FTE count for funding purposes; these students are not required to pay college tuition for the courses.

³ Advanced Placement courses are offered in 22 subject areas, including calculus, American history, biology, economics, and several languages. AP course curricula are developed by the AP Development Committee (by subject field) composed of both university faculty and experienced high school AP teachers.

⁴ In 2007-08, 33,112 high school students were dually enrolled at community colleges and 2,211 high school students were dually enrolled at state universities.

⁵ Section 1007.23, F.S.

⁶ Students must score a 3 or higher on an AP exam and a 4 or higher on an IB exam to be eligible for college credit. Students must pass the dual enrollment course to receive college credit.

⁷ *Student Participation in Acceleration Programs Has Increased; Legislature Has Taken Steps to Reduce Program Costs*, OPPAGA Report No. [08-70](#), December 2008.

As noted in our earlier 2009 report, instructional costs for AP courses are similar to other high school courses, although school districts incur additional costs for students who seek college credit for their AP coursework. However, the amount of incentive funding provided by the state greatly exceeds these additional costs. Our earlier 2009 report presented several options for the Legislature to better align funding with program costs.

Methodology

To determine if students received appropriate college credit for acceleration courses and exams, we reviewed the college credit records of all Florida students who began college in 2005, qualified for acceleration credit while in a public high school, and entered a Florida public college or university. This approach allowed colleges and universities up to two years to award these students acceleration credit. The cohort we examined included over 11,900 students who completed over 51,000 acceleration courses and exams.

We used random sampling to select student records for follow-up at the University of Florida and the University of South Florida. For other institutions we examined all available student records. All the percentages in this report reflect the weights unless we specifically note otherwise.⁸

Findings

Approximately 17.5% of the acceleration courses and exams successfully completed by Florida students did not transfer for college credit to a state university or college. These courses and exams cost the state approximately \$5.8 million.⁹

More than 17% of acceleration courses do not result in the awarding of college credit

In order for acceleration programs to help students expedite their college careers, students successfully completing these programs must be able to transfer the college credit they earn to postsecondary institutions. Florida students entering the state's colleges and universities in 2005-06 qualified to receive college credit for 51,328 acceleration exams and courses.¹⁰ However, 17.5% these courses (representing 8,991 courses and exams) did not transfer to Florida's community colleges and universities for college credit. Most of these problems were caused by students who either completed multiple exams that qualified for the same college credits, or failed to submit documentation of their exam scores and courses.

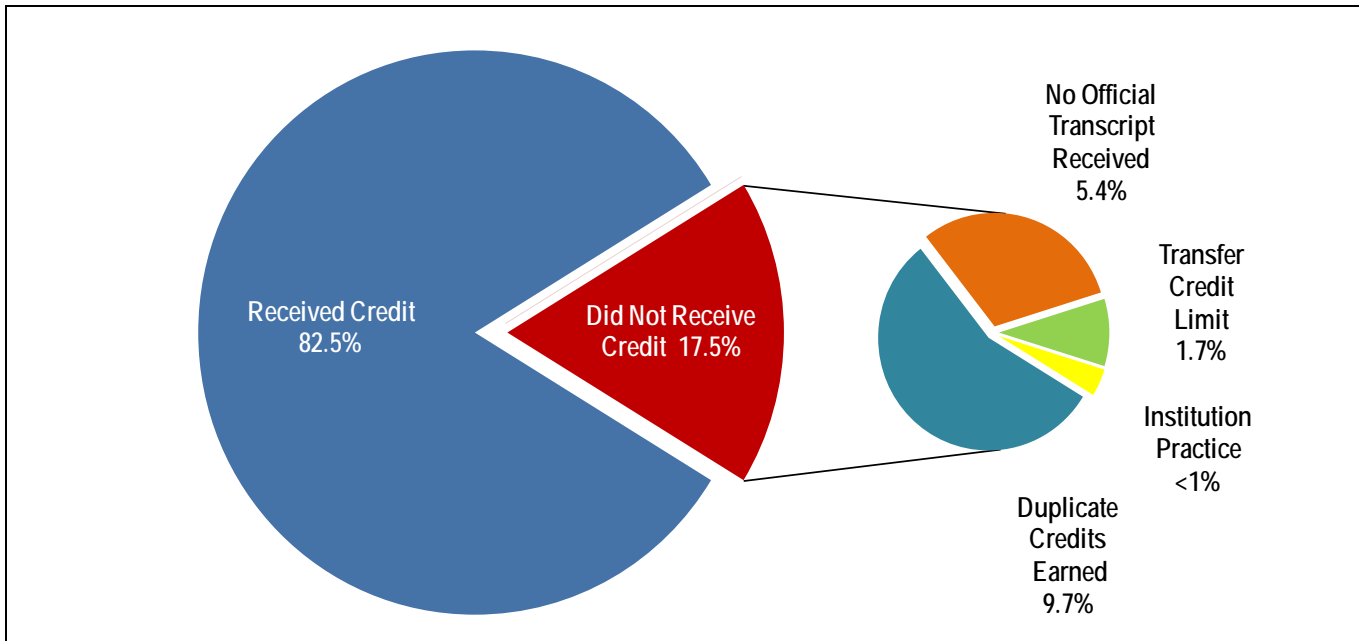
Some acceleration exams result in the same college credit. As shown in Exhibit 1, the most common reason students did not receive college credit for their acceleration exams is that they completed multiple acceleration exams/courses that qualified for credit in the same college course. Specifically, 4,986 exams (10% of the total in our cohort) were associated with students who earned duplicate credit for the same college course. The primary reason this occurred was that the high school students took both the AP English Literature Composition and the AP English Language Composition courses, and passed the exams associated with these courses. While these are different high school courses and AP exams, the state Articulation Coordinating Committee, through the recommendations of university and college faculty, has equated both to the same introductory college English courses. Therefore, universities and colleges are not required to award different college courses for these two AP English exams.

⁸ We examined 18 public institutions that had at least 50 students who did not receive college credit for their high school acceleration tests and courses. With the exception of New College we examined all state universities. We also examined 8 institutions in the Florida College System (formerly the Florida Community College System).

⁹ This estimate is based on those cases in which students took acceleration courses. For AP and IB courses, this estimate only includes those course takers that also took the acceleration exam and scored high enough to earn college credit.

¹⁰ We reviewed only exams that were guaranteed college credit under state policy. However, we did not review AP and IB foreign language exams because state policy allows institutions to award credit based on institutional guidelines.

Exhibit 1
Most Credit Transfer Problems for Acceleration Courses Were Caused by Students Completing Multiple Exams That Qualified for the Same College Credit



Source: OPPAGA analysis of State University and Community College Electronic Students Records.

Some students did not submit an exam record or dual enrollment transcript. Universities and colleges reported not receiving records for 2,780 (5% of cases) AP or IB exams and dual enrollment courses in our cohort. Institutions must receive an official exam record or dual enrollment transcript in order to award college credit. While AP and IB high school courses appear on students' high school transcripts, universities and colleges require official copies of exam records and dual enrollment college transcripts in order to award students credit. Students must request these records to be sent to their postsecondary institution by the College Board and other entities responsible for administering acceleration exams in order to receive credit for the classes. Some students who took acceleration courses reported that they did not submit their exam transcripts because they either mistakenly thought their scores were too low to qualify for college credit, or they wanted to take the class again while in college.¹¹

The state has limited options for addressing students who take acceleration courses and exams but fail to submit their exam scores to their institutions. The College Board requires students to either directly request that their scores be sent to specific institutions or to sign a waiver allowing the scores to be sent to other entities. As a result, universities cannot routinely query the College Board to determine whether incoming students have passed acceleration exams. The state could require students to submit all acceleration exam scores as a condition to receiving Bright Futures and other state financial aid, but the cost of establishing a tracking system to enforce this requirement would likely exceed the savings that could be achieved.

¹¹ We surveyed students who earned acceleration credit for an upcoming report examining how students used their credits once they enrolled in college.

State rules limit the number of acceleration credits students may transfer into colleges and universities. Pursuant to the *Florida Statutes*, the Department of Education and the Board of Governors rule/regulation guarantees students can transfer up to 45 credits hours to state universities and colleges through AP and IB exams.^{12, 13} Some students earn more acceleration credits than this limit while in high school. As a result of this policy, students in our cohort did not receive college credit for 863 (2% of the total cases) exams and courses.

In conflict with the state policy, the University of Florida formerly had a policy that limited the maximum college credit that students could transfer into the University for AP and IB exams to 30 hours. After OPPAGA contacted the university about this practice in 2008, university staff indicated that it changed its policy to align with the state policy to accept a maximum of 45 credit hours.

State universities and colleges failed to award appropriate credit for a small percentage of acceleration exams and courses. Institutions failed to award the student appropriate college credit in approximately 1% (362) of the acceleration exams and courses in our cohort. The most common reason this occurred (in 247 cases) was that students earned credit for an IB exam but did not earn an IB diploma. At the time our cohort entered college (2005-06), state universities and colleges were not required to award credit for all IB exams if the student did not earn an IB diploma. However, the Department of Education and Board of Governors changed this requirement in 2006, after students in our sample entered college.

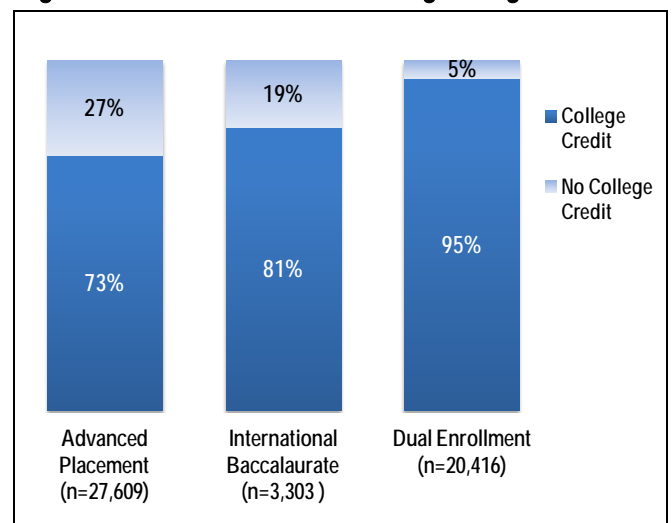
Finally, universities and colleges reported not awarding college credit for 115 cases in our cohort because the institution made an error or the student chose to retake the course. The institutions began reviewing these cases and indicated they would take corrective action as appropriate.

¹² The state rule limits the total credit hours transferred through acceleration exams to comply with the accreditation standards of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The transfer of credits through examinations beyond 45 hours is at the discretion of the institution.

¹³ Dual enrollment courses are transferred according to the Statewide Course Numbering System guidelines. State policy does not restrict the number of dual enrollment courses that can be transferred. However, in order for students to receive a degree from a postsecondary institution, students must complete a certain percentage of their degree coursework at that institution.

College credits earned through AP exams were the least likely to transfer. Most (82%, or 7,347 of 8,991) of the accelerated exams/courses that did not result in college credit were AP exams. As shown by Exhibit 2, over a quarter (27%) of AP exams did not receive college credit, compared to 19% of IB exams and 5% of dual enrollment courses. As discussed earlier, most of the problems associated with the AP exams were attributed to duplicate credits from the AP English Language Composition and AP English Literature Composition exams.

Exhibit 2
Advanced Placement Courses and Exams Had the Highest Incidence of Not Receiving College Credit¹⁴



Source: OPPAGA analysis of State University and Community College electronic students records.

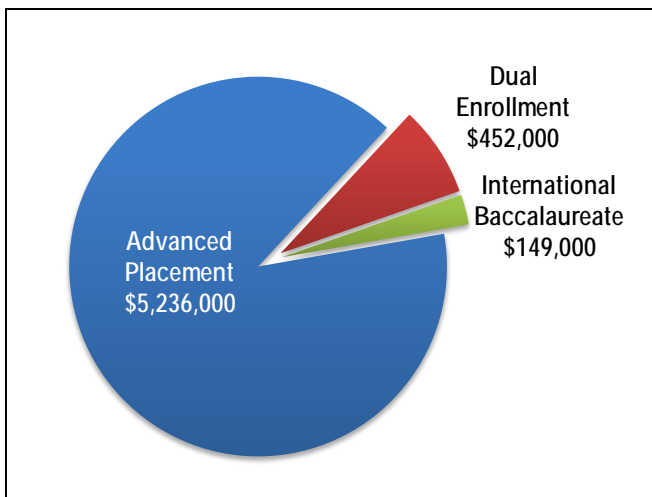
Acceleration courses that did not transfer for college credit cost the state almost \$6 million

A primary goal of acceleration programs is to allow students to earn college credit while in high school and thus produce savings for both students and the state. However, the state does not receive a return on its investment in acceleration programs if students do not subsequently receive college credit after successfully completing these programs.

¹⁴ The number of cases (n) in the exhibit reflects the weighted sample. The non-weighted number of cases is 24,242 for Advanced Placement, 3,180 for International Baccalaureate, and 18,068 for dual enrollment.

As shown in Exhibit 3, the cost to the state for unused acceleration courses and exams was \$5,236,000 for Advanced Placement, \$452,000 for dual enrollment, and \$149,000 for International Baccalaureate.¹⁵ In order for students to earn those forgone credit hours at a public university, the state would have paid approximately \$2.3 million. In addition, students also would have incurred tuition fees and other expenses associated with the courses.

**Exhibit 3
Advanced Placement Courses and Exams
Accounted for Most of the \$5.8 Million Spent on
Unused Acceleration Credit**



Source: OPPAGA analysis of State University and Community College Electronic Students Records.

¹⁵ These estimates are based on the amount of incentive funding the state pays school districts when students successfully pass AP and IB exams. The estimated dual enrollment costs are based on the level of funding the state pays community college per credit hour.

Recommendations

The Legislature could consider several options to reduce these costs. As noted in our companion 2009 report, the Legislature could save between \$3.4 million and \$4.4 million for unused credit if it reduced the level of incentive funding it provides to school districts to better match districts' costs to provide these courses.¹⁶ This would require amending s. 1011.62(1), *Florida Statutes*.

To resolve the problem of high school students taking multiple AP exams that equate to the same college English courses and thus result in forgone college credit, we recommend that the Department of Education and Board of Governors review the college course equivalencies for the AP English Language Composition and AP English Literature Composition exams. College credits that were not transferred from these two exams cost the state \$3 million for the students in our cohort and also may have caused students to retake credit hours at state universities and community colleges.

Agency Response

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.51(5), *Florida Statutes*, a draft of our report was submitted to the Department of Education to review and respond. The Commissioner's written response has been reprinted herein in Appendix A.

¹⁶ *Modifying AP Incentive Funding Could Produce Significant Cost Savings*, OPPAGA Report No. [09-12](#), February 2009.

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Appendix A**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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Commissioner of Education

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March 16, 2009

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RE: Report 09-xx *More Than 17% of Acceleration Courses Do Not Transfer for College Credit, Which Costs State Almost \$6 Million*

Dear Dr. VanLandingham:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft report entitled *More Than 17% of Acceleration Courses Do Not Transfer for College Credit, Which Costs State Almost \$6 Million*. The Department of Education, through the work of the Articulation Coordinating Committee (ACC), has made an effort to ensure that students who successfully complete accelerated courses and examinations have the opportunity to earn college credit.

Section 1007.27, Florida Statutes, directs the Department of Education to identify minimum scores, maximum credit, and postsecondary course equivalencies for each acceleration examination. Postsecondary faculty discipline committees were convened to review each Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE), and College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) examination to determine appropriate passing scores and postsecondary course equivalencies. In 2001, the State Board of Education first adopted the recommendations of the faculty committees as the *ACC Credit-By-Examination Equivalency List*. This list has been revised and expanded several times, with the most recent adoption by the Board of Governors and the State Board of Education in June and August of 2008 respectively.

The OPPAGA report indicated that the most common reason for transfer credit problems was related to duplicate credit equivalencies for students who successfully completed both the AP English Language and Composition exam and the AP English Literature and Composition exam. This is true for students who earn a score of 3 on both exams. In reviewing both AP examinations, postsecondary faculty agreed that, since they both emphasize composition, the closest content equivalency within existing postsecondary courses is ENC 1101 – Freshman Composition I. In addition, faculty did not believe that a

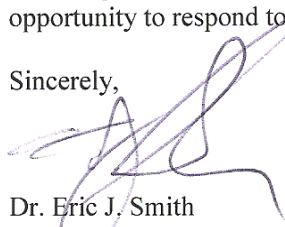
Dr. Gary VanLandingham
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score of 3 on either examination provided evidence that the student was proficient enough in composition to grant credit for the 2 commonly required composition and literature courses (ENC 1101 and ENC 1102 – Freshman Composition II). However, students who earn a score of 4 on either exam are eligible to earn additional guaranteed credit.

To address the issue of duplicate credit, a statement was added to the *ACC Credit-By-Examination Equivalency List* to encourage institutions to award credit for a different course than the one listed if it is beneficial to the student. However, since this was not a requirement, many institutions did not award different credit. The ACC will be completing a thorough review of the list in the coming months and will reconvene the English faculty discipline committee to specifically address this issue. It is anticipated that the list will be revised to ensure that institutions are granting credit for both AP English examinations.

Should you have any further questions for the Department regarding the Advanced Placement Program in Florida, please contact Dr. Heather Sherry at Heather.Sherry@fldoe.org. Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to this report.

Sincerely,



Dr. Eric J. Smith

ES/hs

- c: Dr. Frances Haithcock, Chancellor of Public Schools
- Dr. Willis Holcombe, Chancellor, Division of Community Colleges