PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR DUAL CREDIT PROGRAMS

VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

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FOREWORD

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Principles of Good Practice for Dual-Credit Programs is the second in a series of VCCS good practices publications. The principles described in this document are taken from the practices of deans, provosts, and assessment practitioners who have successfully developed, administered, and evaluated dual-credit programs.

Dual-credit programs provide a good opportunity for increasing numbers of high school students to pay less tuition and shorten the length of time required to complete an associate or baccalaureate degree program. To sustain these advantages for students, however, our colleges must provide certain assurances. They include maintaining quality and establishing the equivalency of dual-credit instruction with other instruction, so that students may readily transfer dual-credit courses to four-year institutions. Equivalency and quality are also important to help ensure that dual-credit programs will meet accreditation standards.

Colleges ensure equivalency in numerous ways, as demonstrated by the good practices described in this document. Other practices that will enhance the partnership between secondary schools and community colleges by promoting understanding of dual-credit program goals, standards, and policies are also provided. We hope that the good practices described in this document will guide you in maintaining quality in the dual-credit programs at your college.

Arnold R. Oliver
Chancellor
INTRODUCTION

This document has been developed as a result of a recommendation from the Advisory Committee of Deans and Provosts that a publication of good practices in dual-credit administration, instruction, and assessment be developed. A primary source of the good practices cited herein was the student outcomes assessment reports, where for the first time in 1995, colleges were required to discuss their assessment results from dual-credit programs. In particular, colleges were asked to describe how they assure quality in dual-credit courses and maintain the equivalency between on-campus and off-campus instruction.

This publication is timely in that the enrollment in dual-credit programs has grown steadily since the Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment Between Virginia Public Schools and Community Colleges was signed in 1988 by the Secretary of Education, the VCCS Chancellor, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. In the last three years, dual-credit enrollment has increased from 3,066 students in 1993 to 3,839 in 1994; more recently, 4,575 dual-credit students enrolled in fall 1995. To accommodate the enrollment increases, colleges in fall 1995, added another 197 courses to the 329 that were offered in fall 1993.

Looking at the mix of courses taken by dual-credit students, in fall 1993 eighty percent (80%) were transfer courses and twenty percent (20%) were occupational-technical courses. In fall 1995 the percentage of transfer courses had increased to eighty-three percent (83%), and the percent of occupational-technical courses had decreased to seventeen percent (17%). At the same time, the average number of credits per student dropped from 5.2 in 1993 to 4.4 in 1995.

Many of the good practices cited in this publication emanate from the special characteristics of the dual-credit programs. In a 1993 VCCS survey, for example, eighty-three percent (83%) of dual-credit faculty were high school faculty who were required to have a masters degree and 18 credit hours in their teaching field. At the same time, the same survey showed that eighty-two percent (82%) of dual-credit instruction was offered at high schools, thus adding the variable of off-campus instruction to the other issues of establishing equivalency. It should be noted, however, that it is the practice of some colleges to use full-time college faculty to teach dual-credit courses.
Deans, provosts, and assessment practitioners who have worked diligently to establish, administer, and assess dual-credit programs have reviewed this document. The categories and principles of good practice provide a set of standards by which the colleges can evaluate their current practice. In future years, it will be appropriate for colleges to develop and share additional good practices as dual-credit programs change and mature.

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SECTION I: CATEGORIES OF GOOD PRACTICES

Two major categories of good practices were identified from a review of the 1995 student outcomes assessment reports and are presented below.

The first, establishing the equivalency of dual-credit instruction with other instruction offered by community colleges, is important for maintaining standards and ensuring the quality of dual-credit instruction. Equivalency is necessary if students who transfer to four-year institutions are to receive credit for dual-credit instruction, thus enabling them to complete baccalaureate degrees without taking additional credits. Also, if the dual-credit programs are to meet accreditation standards, equivalency must be demonstrated. Several principles that will help colleges to establish equivalency are cited below. They involve assurances in areas such as course equivalency; student readiness and eligibility; student placement; faculty qualifications and evaluation, as well as faculty orientation and development; and student outcomes assessment.

A second category of good practices described below concerns promoting widespread understanding of program goals, standards, and policies. Such practices undergird cooperative relationships with dual-credit faculty, secondary school administrators, students, and the parents of those students. These relationships are critical to the success of the dual-credit partnership between secondary schools and community colleges.
SECTION II: DUAL CREDIT INSTRUCTION EQUIVALENCY

1. Course Equivalency.
Prior to offering dual-credit instruction, colleges should adopt procedures that will aid in ensuring equivalency. They should, for example, review the course objectives, syllabi, textbooks and other instructional materials used by dual-credit faculty to ensure that they meet the same standards as those set for regular instruction. Alternative instructional delivery systems, including distance learning, should also be reviewed. Materials and delivery systems should be approved by the college dean and reviewed by other appropriate individuals or college committees.
In addition, full-time college faculty may want to share handouts, student projects, and various evaluation materials with dual-credit faculty. Full-time English faculty, for example, may provide examples for dual-credit faculty of English 111-112 essays that meet English faculty expectations.
An exemplary practice that should be considered by colleges is the development of a portfolio of materials by all adjunct faculty teaching dual-credit courses. The portfolio should be compared with others from on-campus classes that are taught by full-time faculty.

2. Student Eligibility
Colleges should develop and publish policies concerning student eligibility for participating in dual-credit courses. The policies should ensure that students are both prepared for and can benefit from an accelerated learning program. The responsibilities and authority of individuals for determining student eligibility at both the colleges and high schools should be clearly designated. Periodically, colleges should re-examine the criteria used to establish eligibility for participation in the dual-credit programs. Results from outcomes assessment may be useful in demonstrating that eligibility criteria are valid and reliable.

3. Course Placement Procedures
Colleges should use the same course placement procedures for dual-credit students as those that are used for other students. If they are not required, colleges should consider making writing samples an integral part of placement testing.
4. **Faculty Qualifications**
   All faculty teaching dual-credit courses should have qualifications that meet both VCCS and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) requirements. College administrators should regularly validate dual-credit faculty credentials to ensure that they comply with VCCS and SACS requirements.

5. **Faculty Evaluation**
   The same process that is used to evaluate other on-campus and off-campus adjunct faculty should be used to evaluate dual-credit faculty. Full-time faculty and division chairs should make site visits to observe and evaluate instruction in dual-credit classes. Student evaluations should be considered in the evaluation process, and provisions be made by the college to strengthen any identified weaknesses.

6. **Faculty Orientation and Development**
   Appropriate interaction between dual-credit faculty and their full-time college counterparts helps maintain equivalency between dual-credit and other college instruction. An **exemplary practice** that should be considered by all colleges is a mentoring program, where full-time faculty serve as resources for dual-credit faculty. A part of this program could include invitations to dual-credit faculty to come to campus to observe how the classes they teach are conducted on campus.

   In addition, dual-credit faculty should have the same orientation as other college adjuncts. Division chairs might want to conduct orientation sessions for dual-credit faculty at their work sites. A meeting to discuss various issues related to dual-credit instruction, once or more each semester, between full-time and dual-credit faculty should be standard practice. An **exemplary practice** would be for colleges to conduct a special workshop for dual-credit and full-time faculty to address specific problems such as those that relate to placement procedures, eligibility standards, or the perceived strengths and weaknesses of writing samples. Invitations should be extended to four-year college faculty to participate in the workshops to discuss dual-credit student success at the four-year institutions.
7. Student Outcomes Assessment
Colleges should continuously assess whether learning outcomes are being achieved by students who enroll in dual-credit classes. Consistent with assessment strategies in other areas, attention should be given to using multiple assessment methods, consisting of both direct and indirect measures, and to monitoring the performance of dual-credit students over time.

It is the responsibility of each college to ensure that dual-credit students achieve, at a minimum, at levels equal to students who take classes on campus or at other off-campus sites. This assurance should be during the time of enrollment in dual-credit classes, and comparisons should continue as students complete their education at either a two-year or four-year institution.

Assessment findings can be used to monitor student achievement and to make sure that dual-credit classes are taught at the collegiate level. Colleges should consider developing a common set of questions to be included in the final exams of dual-credit and other classes both on-campus and off-campus. They should compare the placement test results with the grades of both on-campus and dual-credit students. Full-time faculty should be involved in grading random samples of dual-credit student essays or other written work. For these projects, criteria should be established and a ranking scale used by all evaluators. Alternatively, dual-credit and full-time faculty could cross-grade essays or student projects. An exemplary practice is the evaluation of dual-credit student portfolios by division chairs to ensure that courses, as judged by content, assignments, tests, and evaluation of student performance, are equivalent to on-campus sections of the same courses.

Colleges should continuously monitor the grade distributions of dual-credit classes and compare them with the same classes taught on campus and at other off-site locations. Also, where possible, the success of dual-credit students should be tracked from pre-requisite courses to the subsequent,
related course. Surveys of currently enrolled dual-credit students, as well as seniors who have completed their dual-credit classes, should be administered by all colleges.

In addition to student perceptions concerning quality, colleges should consider adding special questions to existing student surveys to examine the perceptions of dual-credit students concerning the adequacy of instructional support services, equipment, and counseling services. All colleges, in addition to student comments, should seek input from high school counselors, administrators, and parents concerning the effectiveness of dual-credit classes.

The use of assessment data and information should be given special consideration at each college. Assessment results should be compiled, analyzed, and shared with appropriate faculty and administrators at both the colleges and high schools. Colleges might also consider distributing the grade point averages of dual-credit students to school division superintendents and compiling students’ written comments to share with faculty, high school principals, and college administrators. Where full-time faculty participate in assessment projects such as grading essays or evaluating laboratory exercises, colleges should ensure that results are provided and discussed with appropriate faculty.

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SECTION III: PROMOTING WIDESPREAD UNDERSTANDING OF PROGRAM GOALS, STANDARDS, AND POLICIES

1. Handbook
Written dual-credit policies and procedures should be developed by colleges and published in a handbook. Before publication, the policies and procedures should be reviewed by both high school and college administrators, faculty, and counselors. The handbook should be widely distributed, and discussed in orientation sessions. It should contain all college policies on dual-credit, including faculty qualifications, as well as procedures for registration, grading, withdrawal, and add/drops.

2. Orientation Programs
To ensure that all participants in dual-credit programs have a full understanding of the purpose, standards, policies, and procedures established for the program, each college should develop one or more orientation programs. Programs should be developed for dual-credit students and potential dual-credit students, as well as faculty, counselors, and administrators, at both the high school and college. Colleges should consider using dual-credit students as ambassadors, requesting that they return to the high schools and talk with potential students about the program and its advantages.

Colleges should send a letter to parents describing the dual-credit program and inviting them to college events such as an open house. An exemplary practice that colleges should consider is an orientation program where the parents of dual-credit students meet with college administrators.

3. Program Coordination
Colleges should ensure that their dual-credit programs are well administered and that policies and procedures are followed. Each college should designate someone to coordinate the dual-credit program. Procedures to ensure that students are informed of the need to request transcripts prior to transferring to a four-year institution should be developed by each community college.
Questions or Feedback about this document or any other VCCS “best practices” publications may be directed to:

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