

## Three Views on Concurrent Enrollment

by Kent Scheffel, Vice President of Enrollment Services at Lewis and Clark Community College

In this article, I would like to draw together three policy and practitioner vantage points on concurrent enrollment: national, state, and local. To do this I would like to take up questions of quality, program accreditation, and educational policy, among others, by changing hats throughout based on my roles in the [National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships \(NACEP\)](#), Lewis and Clark Community College, and Illinois Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (ILACEP). My hope is to provide a view of central concerns about concurrent enrollment from different vantage points. In some cases the three perspectives will align. But this isn't always the case and I hope to highlight these as well.

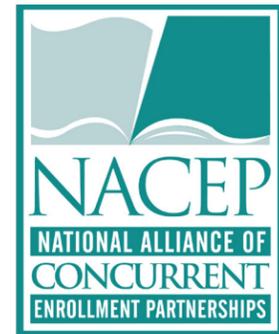
### NACEP: A National View

I would like to begin at the national level, and in particular NACEP accreditation of concurrent enrollment programs. NACEP began as a conversation among educators at the American Association of Higher Education conference, held at Syracuse University in 1997. Two years later, 20 founding institutions officially established the organization in order to help ensure the quality of college classes offered to high school students through concurrent enrollment partnerships.

NACEP has reached several milestones since its establishment in 1999. In 2002, NACEP adopted national standards for concurrent enrollment programs. Two years later in 2004 the first four programs successfully earned accreditation after documenting to a peer review team that their programs had implemented the standards. Interest in the accreditation process has grown over the past decade as institutions and states seek to raise the caliber and stature of their programs. As of the 2015–2016 school year, 97 concurrent enrollment programs around the country hold NACEP accreditation: 59 two-year public colleges, 29 four-year public universities, and 9 four-year private colleges and universities. The most important concern for concurrent enrollment courses is quality. Courses that are truly college-level both produce positive learning outcomes for students, and assure colleges and universities of that value of course credits.

### Kent Scheffel

Kent Scheffel offers a unique combination of expertise on dual credit, and more generally, concurrent enrollment. Kent is vice president of enrollment services at Lewis and Clark Community College, where he oversees one of the largest dual credit programs in Illinois. The program extends to eighteen high schools in his college district, and is currently the only [National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships \(NACEP\)](#) accredited program in the state. In addition, Kent is currently serving a two-year term as president of NACEP. Finally, in the past year Kent has taken an active role in establishing an Illinois state chapter of NACEP, also known as the Illinois Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships.



#### Vision

The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships will lead in advancing seamless education through secondary and postsecondary collaborations.

#### Mission

NACEP fosters student success and achievement by supporting standards of excellence that promote program and professional development, accreditation, research and advocacy.

Visit the [NACEP website](#) for more information.

Concurrent enrollment courses also have the ability to respond to local, state, and regional needs in a distinctive manner, even beyond other accelerated high school learning. For example, if community leaders and elected officials in a metropolitan area begin an economic development initiative related to the technology industry, concurrent enrollment courses can be designed and offered to students to help them learn the technical skills and to ready them for a certificate or degree program to meet employment needs and opportunities. Concurrent enrollment courses are also readily adapted to new programs and fields at the four-year college level as well. For example, new transfer agreements are being developed to include new Restoration Ecology and Computer Networking courses.

Most colleges and universities are continually looking for new programs and strategies to prepare and enroll top students, and to see them through to certificate or degree attainment. Importantly, research by the National Student Clearinghouse shows that students who take concurrent enrollment courses are at least 10% more likely to complete a degree. In all, concurrent enrollment is an extremely cost effective program that can be a win for students, high schools, and colleges.

With that said, I want to change hats and speak from the standpoint of Lewis and Clark Community College, which is NACEP accredited. While this is partly a way to emphasize the benefits of accreditation at the college district level, I want to paint a realistic picture of the benefits as well as the challenges in offering an accredited concurrent enrollment, or dual credit in Illinois, program, especially for colleges that are considering the application process and trying to weigh the costs and benefits of the standards.

### Lewis and Clark Community College: Accreditation from the District Perspective

Lewis and Clark, located in Godfrey, on the Illinois border north of St. Louis, received our accreditation in 2007. And just last year, 2014, we went through the re-accreditation process. Our decision to pursue accreditation was spurred on by a rapid growth in enrollment when we

transitioned from credit-in-escrow, in which students received college but not high school course credits, to dual credit. Program growth underscored the need to maintain and ensure quality especially concerning high school instructor credentials, the curriculum, and methods of assessment. We also saw the value in offering a program that was recognized in the same manner as other academic programs within Lewis and Clark that were nationally accredited. In short, because national accreditation was the standard for other college programs, and because the standards translate into quality assurance, it was essential to elevate our dual credit program to the same academic level.

What we found is that NACEP accreditation provided the blueprint for course standards as well as program operation and management. It allowed us to feel confident that high school learning outcomes aligned with those on campus. And it enhanced the reputation of the dual credit program in the college and in our partner high schools. While many programs throughout the country operate at a high level and have admirable outcomes, a limited number have taken the steps to earn NACEP accreditation. In fact, currently, Lewis and Clark offers the only accredited program in Illinois. (From the NACEP standpoint, we hope to increase membership in the state.) From the college standpoint, accreditation allows us to promote the program, internally and externally, with added stature when people realize that it has been recognized through national accreditation. Accreditation is also beneficial in working with college or university regional accreditors. The regional bodies recognize the value of NACEP accreditation, and the policies and practices it entails, and this only helps the college meet the expectations of regional bodies. But like any other worthwhile academic endeavor, securing and maintaining accreditation is not easy. Fortunately, our college administration and high school partners were supportive of the process and were committed to earning accreditation. But the phrase I would use is "time intensive."

The application process entails a comprehensive peer review, an institutional self-study, and extensive planning in order to implement NACEP's 17 national standards for program quality in the areas of curriculum, faculty credentials, student qualifications and assessments, and

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program evaluation (more on this in a moment). And, as other colleges might expect, the main challenge of the application process was producing the necessary documentation. NACEP requires a self-study of applicants' programs in the same manner as regional accreditors. While a NACEP self-study is not on the same scale as one required for college-wide accreditation, we also had fewer staff and faculty to complete it, and the time and effort of those involved was considerable. On the one hand, we discovered that we were already adhering to NACEP standards for the most part. On the other hand, documenting adherence is a time consuming effort.

We faced a bigger hurdle once we received accreditation, because in a sense the process was just beginning. I highlighted the final element above — program evaluation — because this has been the real challenge: the ongoing assessment of ourselves. While Lewis and Clark was following most of NACEP's standards, even before accreditation — due in part to rigorous but less comprehensive Illinois state standards — the evaluation regime was an added and substantial dimension we needed to implement and maintain. Course evaluations were required, as well as surveys of counselors, teachers, principals, recent high school graduates, and graduates who were four-years removed from high school. Site visits to the high schools by our college program coordinators were added as well. The site visits were implemented to ensure the course content and learning outcomes were aligned for on-campus and off-campus courses. Some college coordinators and high school faculty were initially hesitant about the visits. In some cases coordinators were reluctant to evaluate the high school teachers' courses, and the teachers were unsure about the coordinators' expectations.

Our evaluation process also requires ongoing professional development for faculty, and we initially thought some high school teachers may be reluctant to take part in the workshops. The response from the teachers quickly proved that we were incorrect. Teachers appreciated the opportunity to discuss changes and updates with their discipline and to share ideas with colleagues. Many high school teachers now look forward to the professional development sessions and respond with high marks on the session evaluations.

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The level of cooperation also extends to college and high school administrators. Both groups are aware of the challenges faced by the other and work together to produce mutual benefits. For example, high school administrators often confer with the college regarding teacher qualifications during the hiring process to ensure that she or he could offer a dual credit course. And the college regularly attends school board meetings in order to report on student data, credit hours earned, and tuition savings. Importantly, accreditation also serves as quality assurance for parents who are unfamiliar with concurrent enrollment or accelerated learning. In all, the key to overcoming the concerns we anticipated or faced in the evaluation process was the development of a collaborative approach between high school and college personnel, and the broader community, and a shared focus on program quality and positive student learning outcomes.

The biggest challenge, even frustration, in the evaluation process, which is much less controllable than high school and college involvement, is student responsiveness to our surveys. It is very difficult to achieve the desired evaluation response rates from students who are no longer in the dual credit program. Conducting course evaluations and surveying teachers, counselors and principals can be completed in an efficient manner. They are invested, motivated, and we know where they are. By contrast, former dual credit students, four years out, have often moved and are hard to stay in contact with, and in general have moved on with their lives. Understandably, they are not concerned with program evaluations or longitudinal studies. Even being able to contact them does not guarantee that they will answer. Yet this is an important part of understanding the impact of dual credit: college enrollment, persistence, certificate and degree attainment, and career paths. And, it is part of the accreditation evaluation regime. Student tracking is daunting in general, and unfortunately we are no exception to the rule. The irony is that we want them to venture out into the world, but not so far that we can't follow their paths.

The good news is that we do have the ability to promote success for students in dual credit courses, and to know when they do succeed. For example, our college math department provides common exams for most sections

of math offered on-campus and at high schools. The exams provide the math department with the assurance that high school students are graded on the same course content and performing in the same manner as their traditional college student counterparts. Our English dual credit goes one step further. The college coordinator actually gathers the same writing assignments from high school and college students, and they are blindly distributed among high school and college instructors to achieve consistency in grading. And quite often the high school students have better overall outcomes than on-campus students.

One final note from the Lewis and Clark standpoint. An ongoing challenge will be the retirement of many qualified instructors who are being replaced by teachers who do not have the necessary credentials to teach concurrent enrollment courses. Many school districts are seeking teachers with a bachelor's degree and limited experience as a result of budget constraints. While the moves aid the districts in budgeting, a reduction in teachers with a master's degree and academic credentials required by NACEP (and state) standards will result in fewer concurrent enrollment courses for students.

### National Goals

Returning to the national level and looking ahead, NACEP has three overarching goals. First, we will enhance our membership services at all levels, in part through the creation of a new position, Director of Accreditation and Member Services. Our goal is partly a response to institutional member calls for additional publications and electronic resources, as well as the increased demand for services through the formation of state and regional chapters. We will also increase our connection with and support of high school district and state agency members, through new networking opportunities and the development of new resources. And overall, we hope to increase membership and accreditation, especially given the extensive national landscape of concurrent enrollment programs and the importance of quality and support.

Second, NACEP, through our Accreditation Commission, is embarking on our periodic review of standards. The accreditation standards were originally adopted in 2002, and revised in 2009. At our national conference in Denver, in October, preliminary information was gathered from attendees. Internal discussions regarding the standards are continuing, and the concerns of regional accrediting bodies and various state standards will be reviewed prior to adopting any changes.

Third, we are strengthening the role of NACEP, nationwide, as a central voice and organizer for concurrent enrollment policy and practice. For example, NACEP is currently working with members in over 20 states to organize state or regional meetings of concurrent enrollment professionals, conduct professional development workshops, and hold

### NACEP's Four Step Accreditation Cycle



state conferences. We are enhancing the technical assistance we provide to statewide initiatives to develop and sustain high quality concurrent enrollment programs, and forming closer relationships with policy agencies and organizations such as state education commissions and ACT. And, NACEP continues to advance concurrent enrollment through its advocacy work. The annual Policy Seminar in Washington, D.C., proves very successful at increasing member knowledge of policies that impacts their work and building awareness among Washington policy-makers about the value of concurrent enrollment.

A final aspect of NACEP that I will focus on is the growing trend of forming state and regional chapters. This also leads me to change hats a final time to speak from the standpoint of Illinois' efforts in this area. State and regional collaboration is not new. States such as Utah and Minnesota have had collaborative networks of concurrent enrollment professionals that date back a decade or more. What is new is the formal establishment of chapters that work on the ground, at the regional, state, and local levels, and also have a direct position and role within NACEP.

### Forming a State Chapter of NACEP

The first two NACEP chapters are the state chapter, [Ohio Alliance of Dual Enrollment Partnerships](#), which was recognized by NACEP in 2014, and the regional chapter, the [New England Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships](#), which was recognized in 2015. In addition, chapters are in various stages of development in eight states: Utah, Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Wyoming, Kansas, and Arkansas.

Let me conclude by speaking to the Illinois effort, known as the Illinois Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (ILACEP), which, as I noted, is still under development. While Illinois dual credit programs periodically connected at statewide conferences or at meetings convened by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), there has not been a regular forum for these programs to gather to share resources and best practices, or to work collaboratively on a statewide level. For example, dual credit standards and funding in Illinois fall under the administration of ICCB and the Illinois Higher Education Board. A state chapter will allow members to identify common concerns and to engage state agencies in a constructive and strategic way. Our hope is that the state chapter will also amplify the reach of NACEP and

its services in areas such as professional development, especially to help high school teachers earn the required credentials to teach a dual credit course. This is one of the biggest challenges faced by Illinois and other states. Our approach to forming a chapter has been by the numbers. We modeled our organizing process and bylaws on the Ohio and New England chapters. We formed work groups around developing by-laws, contacting potential members, developing a professional development workshop, and the election of officers. And, in September 2015, the by-laws were approved by an electronic vote and we elected our first officers. I am pleased to say that Dr. David Naze of Prairie State College, in Chicago Heights, is serving as the first chapter president. Our next step will be to determine our immediate and longer-term goals and objectives in areas such as professional development or member engagement with state policy questions.

I am excited about the future of ILACEP, in part because of the collaborative relationships that it promises to foster. Like other volunteer organizations, it is the members who will realize the success and sustainability of the chapter. There are many people, administrators, coordinators, and faculty, who are committed to the ongoing growth and development of concurrent enrollment. Their belief in its value and their passion for students will be vital to the chapter's long-term success.

Please feel free to [contact me](#) with questions or thoughts about any aspect of concurrent enrollment, national, state, and district. Referencing the "OCCRL Newsletter" will help me to make an immediate connection!

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