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Policy, financial, and transportation barriers have limited participation in dual enrollment for marginalized (low-socioeconomic, first-generation, and ethnic minority) students in Oklahoma. This chapter presents a collaborative effort by education and community leaders that has successfully eliminated these barriers and increased the number of marginalized students participating in dual enrollment.

Eliminating Barriers to Dual Enrollment in Oklahoma

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Program Development

In early 2010, the Tulsa P-20 Council, an action committee composed of over 20 community, nonprofit, and education leaders in Tulsa County, Oklahoma, examined the high dropout rates in the Tulsa Public School (TPS) district. The P-20 Council is a subcouncil of the Community Service Council of Tulsa, which is a Tulsa area United Way partner. The Tulsa Community College (TCC) president and the superintendents of TPS and Union Public School (UPS) districts had been meeting informally for breakfast to discuss educational needs in the Tulsa area and decided to present the idea to expand dual enrollment at the P-20 Council meetings. During the discussions, several superintendents for Tulsa area schools noted the positive impact that dual enrollment appeared to have on the performance and persistence of their students. Council members also identified several barriers to dual enrollment including policy barriers in the form of high academic admission standards, financial barriers in the form of substantial textbook and enrollment fees, and transportation barriers since dual enrollment opportunities were only available on college campuses. After identifying these barriers the council decided to develop a plan to eliminate the barriers and “Increase accessibility to higher education for all students including concurrent enrollment and dual enrollment programs” (Tulsa County P-20 Council, 2010, Objective 2). The purpose of this chapter is to describe these barriers

and how Tulsa navigated and eliminated these barriers to increase access to dual enrollment for low-socioeconomic, first-generation, and ethnic minority students.

Public relations and marketing departments from TCC, UPS, and TPS collaborated to create marketing materials and coined the term “EXCEerate” to brand the pilot project and differentiate it from regular dual enrollment at TCC.

Addressing Policy Barriers. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) is the governing body for higher education in the state of Oklahoma. The OSRHE supports dual enrollment by requiring that all high schools provide information to students about dual enrollment and offering 100% tuition waivers for high school seniors. Based on the philosophy that only upper-academic students could be successful, current admission policies favor upper-academic students (i.e., OSRHE policy of 21 ACT or 3.5 GPA for juniors and 19 ACT or 3.0 GPA for seniors). However, research indicates that mid-academic-level students also have the potential to be successful in dual enrollment courses (Karp, 2012). Thus, TCC submitted a request on behalf of the P-20 Council to the OSRHE to develop and implement a pilot project with TPS and UPS supporting a goal to eliminate barriers to dual enrollment, and the request included seven exceptions for the EXCEerate pilot project.

The first exception request addressed OSRHE’s admission policy of 21 ACT or 3.5 GPA for juniors and 19 or 3.0 GPA for seniors. The exception for admitting dual enrollment students with a 19 ACT or 2.5 GPA was granted, with the rationale that it would allow mid-academic-level high school students attending TPS and UPS schools to participate in dual enrollment at TCC. The second exception request was related to OSRHE’s policy that sophomores were not allowed to participate in dual enrollment. The exception allowed sophomores with a 19 ACT PLAN test score to enroll in TCC’s Strategies for Academic Success, a study skills course. The ACT PLAN test is a predictor of ACT performance and is administered to all sophomore students in the state of Oklahoma. The proposal’s rationale was that the course would prepare students for future dual enrollment courses. The third exception targeted OSRHE’s policy that a high school student may not enroll in a combined number of high school and college credits above 19 semester credit hours. Because extracurricular courses are included in this calculation, students who are enrolled in sports, band, and other extracurricular courses face barriers to enrolling in dual enrollment courses. The exception allowed a combined college workload of 19 semester credit hours excluding extracurricular elective courses. The rationale for this exception was that students could incorporate extracurricular elective courses into their schedule and still be successful in college courses.

The fourth exception regarded OSRHE’s policy that high school students must maintain a college cumulative GPA of 2.0. The exception request

was to allow students who fall below 2.0 to be placed on academic probation for one semester to allow them the opportunity to continue enrollment and improve their performance. The fifth exception related to OSRHE's policy that high school teachers may not teach college courses at a high school during the day. The exception allowed high school teachers who meet TCC full-time faculty qualifications to teach dual enrollment courses at the high school. The rationale was that having qualified high school teachers who can teach TCC courses would promote collegiality between high school and college faculty and ensure financial sustainability of the program. The sixth exception was in response to OSRHE's policy that high school students are not allowed to enroll in any remedial courses offered by colleges or universities designed to remove basic academic skill deficiencies. The exception allows dually admitted students to enroll in remedial courses offered by TCC. The rationale was that TCC would provide remedial courses on the high school campus in collaboration with high school faculty to ensure that course content would prepare students for college-level work.

The seventh and final exception was to allow the ACT PLAN (otherwise known as PLAN) test score to be used as a qualifier for dual enrollment. The policy exception allowed a minimum PLAN composite test score of 19 (equivalent to an ACT composite score range of 20–24) to be used to admit juniors and seniors. The rationale for the policy exception was that the cost of the ACT exam is a barrier for low-income students, whereas the OSRHE pays for the PLAN. The PLAN is administered to all high school students in Oklahoma during their sophomore year and is a reliable predictor of performance on the regular ACT.

Addressing Financial Barriers. Eighty-five percent of students at TPS and 62% of UPS students qualify for free and reduced lunch (i.e., low-income) and may not afford tuition, fees, and textbooks required to participate in dual enrollment. Approval of the policy exceptions and a financial agreement between TCC, TPS, and UPS created an unprecedented opportunity for students to enroll in dual enrollment college coursework at a high school campus during the regular school day for a greatly reduced price. This financial agreement provided full-time TCC faculty to be reassigned to act as EXCElerate faculty liaisons who provided oversight for part-time faculty and the high school classrooms (technology, space, classroom environment). The agreement also reduced TCC's course enrollment fees for EXCElerate students from approximately \$100 to \$12.75 per three-credit-hour course. In addition, the school districts agreed to purchase the college course textbooks. Since the textbooks were a significant investment by the public schools, the TCC faculty liaisons guaranteed a minimum two-year life cycle for courses taught at high schools so the high schools would not absorb the cost of new textbooks every academic year. The EXCElerate students checked out the textbooks, were

allowed to take them home, and returned the textbooks at the end of the semester.

Addressing Transportation Barriers. Since many high school students depend on a district school bus for transportation to the high school, many students are unable to drive to TCC to participate in dual enrollment at the college. TCC agreed to offer courses at TPS and UPS high school locations during the EXCErate pilot program with the provision that a collegiate environment and course rigor be maintained. By offering college courses at high school locations during the day, students without their own transportation could now participate in dual enrollment through EXCErate.

Program Results

The TCC Planning and Institutional Research Department provided data analysis for five semesters during the EXCErate pilot program (for more details about the methodology and analysis, see Gamez Vargas, Roach, & David, 2014). Student enrollment and success measures of EXCErate students were compared as a cohort group to high school students who took TCC courses on one of TCC’s four campuses during the same semesters. Analyses examined demographic as well as student success measures. Of particular interest regarding demographics, results from chi-square tests revealed that significantly more Black or African American (8.9% vs. 1.5%) and Hispanic (8.8% vs. 2.8%) students, as well as juniors (23.8% vs. 13.3%), were enrolled in the EXCErate group than in the group of non-EXCErate high schools students who took courses on TCC campuses.

Findings related to student success indicated that rates of enrollment in TCC courses in the next semester were comparable across the EXCErate and on-campus dual enrollment student groups (see Table 3.1 for details). Subsequent enrollment numbers counted students multiple times if they

Table 3.1 Student Success Outcomes Across Five Semesters for EXCErate and Non-EXCErate Students

| <i>Outcome</i> | <i>EXCErate (n = 1,118)</i> | <i>On-Campus Dual Enrollment (n = 1,794)</i> |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| TCC enrollment in subsequent term | 934 of 1,699 (55.0%) | 1,440 of 2,624 (54.9%) |
| Matriculation to TCC next fall | 264 of 863 seniors (30.6%) | 387 of 1,347 seniors (28.7%) |
| Course retention (grades other than W) | 2,143 of 2,336 (91.7%) | 3,963 of 4,123 (96.1%) |
| Grades of C or better | 1,945 of 2,336 (83.3%) | 3,702 of 4,123 (89.8%) |

Note: Forty-eight students took courses in the EXCErate program as well as on one of TCC’s campuses; these students are counted in both groups to most accurately reflect the student populations taking courses at the different locations.

enrolled in multiple terms since the beginning of the EXCEerate program because they may have enrolled again after one semester but not another. Moreover, rates of fall matriculation to TCC for high school seniors enrolled in the previous spring semester were similar across the two groups. Chi-square tests indicated that dual enrolled students taking classes at TCC campuses had significantly higher rates of course retention (i.e., grades other than Withdrawal or Administrative Withdrawal) and grades of C or better than those in the EXCEerate group. Although further exploration would help elucidate the factors underlying these differences, EXCEerate students would be expected to have somewhat lower success rates in general because they began with lower GPAs and test scores. Yet, the success rates of both groups were higher than the overall rates for all TCC students, suggesting high levels of success for dual enrolled students both at their high schools and on TCC's campuses.

As a result of the pilot project, several notable developments have occurred. TCC developed an office of High School Relations and appointed a dean, who subsequently was endowed as a chair of Collegiate Academies by the George Kaiser Family Foundation. UPS completed a \$28 million Union Collegiate Academy construction project, and TPS created the Will Rogers College High School during the "Project Schoolhouse" efficiency initiative in 2011–2012. TPS completed an extensive renovation to the Will Rogers College High School annex building at a cost of \$850,000 in order to provide students an authentic collegiate experience. These developments indicate growing support in the Tulsa area for expanding college access to high school students through dual enrollment while maintaining course quality and supporting a collegiate experience.

Challenges and Solutions

Although the EXCEerate program has experienced many successes, implementation has not come without its challenges. For example, TCC faculty expressed legitimate concerns for maintaining college rigor and a collegiate experience on the high school campus. It also became apparent that some faculty felt threatened and saw the EXCEerate program as competition for enrollment at TCC campuses. The dean of High School Relations collaborated with the TCC Faculty Association Executive Board to create a Faculty Association Concurrent Enrollment (FACE) committee to address these concerns. Working together, the vice president for Academic Affairs, dean of High School Relations, and the FACE committee developed dual enrollment partnership guidelines based on the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) standards. The committee also established a list of approved general education courses that could be offered at the high schools, choosing freshman-level courses that EXCEerate students were most likely to be successful in and benefit from as well as courses that were transferable to all Oklahoma public higher education

institutions. The FACE committee and dean of High School Relations continue to meet monthly and collaborate on emerging issues. The faculty liaisons make classroom observations every semester and inspect classrooms for technology readiness and an environment conducive to a collegiate experience. The meetings are also important in an effort to continually improve EXCErate program outcomes.

Another challenge related to how Oklahoma high schools awarded credit to dual enrollment students. Oklahoma Senate Bill 290 was enacted into law in July 2009 and mandated that dual enrolled students receive credit for both high school and college as a core course if the high school and community college curricula are aligned. For example, college Composition I and II classes have typically been considered by most high schools to have equivalent learning outcomes to high school senior English; however, college nutrition courses are transcribed back to high schools as physical education, science, biology, or sometimes as an elective. Almost five years later local school boards are still inconsistent in many areas such as awarding core or elective credit or if final grades will be weighted or nonweighted. EXCErate has been an impetus for equity in this area as it expands to include more school districts. The trend has been to increase high school core credits from one half to one semester credit and to weight grades similarly to Advanced Placement (AP) scores. This is a significant shift in the academic landscape and will likely increase dual enrollment participation by students previously attracted to AP courses.

Future Considerations

The OSRHE implemented the tuition waiver reimbursement for up to six credit hours per semester to public colleges and universities in Oklahoma for high school senior students in 2005. While the tuition waiver has been helpful, the state has not been able to fully fund tuition waivers for high school senior students over the past several years. Although a majority of public higher education institutions in the state have continued to provide tuition waivers for high school senior students, TCC has continued to cover not only seniors but juniors as well with supplementary financial support from the TCC Foundation. The result is that TCC is now heavily subsidizing the cost for dual enrollment at \$270,000 per semester. TCC is committed to supporting dual enrollment but the financial reality is that as participation increases the resulting increased cost could become a limitation to sustainability and growth. In early discussions about funding, participating high schools agreed to allow TCC to utilize their teachers with 15 graduate hours in the core course discipline to teach college courses at the high school during the day. Yet, a number of factors have affected the high school partners' abilities to implement the use of qualified high school teachers. For instance, one limitation is that since Oklahoma has not previously allowed

high school teachers to teach college courses at the high school, teachers have not been motivated to complete graduate hours in core disciplines, opting instead to complete graduate hours in education while in pursuit of a master's degree in education. This results in an extremely limited pool of qualified high school teachers. The high schools have also been limited by budget cuts and cannot afford to reallocate teacher load from regular high school courses to college courses.

An additional research study has been commissioned to more fully understand perspectives of all stakeholders in the EXCEerate pilot program. The new study utilizes research instruments to collect qualitative data that will inform the development of a logic model. The logic model is an integral component of a long-term strategic plan and will help stakeholders make decisions to establish sustainability of the EXCEerate program.

Conclusion

The results of the data analysis are favorable for continuing the EXCEerate program and the model has already been expanded to other area high schools. College courses are offered at the high schools or at area community campuses (career tech centers, satellite and state university campuses in the TCC service area). The \$12.75 three-credit-hour course fee has been renewed for an additional year at TPS and UPS but is \$36.75 at new EXCEerate locations, reflecting the addition of the technology fee to the library and assessment fee. In addition, OSHRE has extended the pilot project for the academic year 2015–2016. These OSRHE policy exceptions remain limited to TPS and UPS until OSRHE determines if any policy exceptions should be considered for continuation, expansion, or implementation at the state level. The findings and implications of this report are significant because they address challenges of recruitment, retention, and ultimately the need to have an understanding of the experiences of marginalized students who are capable of, but not previously identified for, early college success. Moreover, by gathering data about marginalized students, institutions can more fully support these students' needs for early college success. Results of this study may be generalizable to larger populations of students who could benefit from similar strategies and interventions. The state of Oklahoma would benefit from policy revisions informed by data and information included in this chapter.

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