



9-2013

## CWPA Position Statement on Pre-College Credit for Writing

Krtistine Hansen

Jeffrey Andelora

Heidi Estrem

Clint Gardner

Joseph Janangelo

Loyola University Chicago, [jjanang@luc.edu](mailto:jjanang@luc.edu)

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.luc.edu/english\\_facpubs](https://ecommons.luc.edu/english_facpubs)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hansen, K, J Andelora, H Estrem, C Gardner, J Janangelo, and S Miller-Cochran. "CWPA Position Statement on Pre-College Credit for Writing." WPA: Writing Program Administration, 2013.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications and Other Works by Department at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in English: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).  
© Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2013.

---

**Authors**

Kristine Hansen, Jeffrey Andelora, Heidi Estrem, Clint Gardner, Joseph Janangelo, and Susan Miller-Cochran

# **CWPA Position Statement on Pre-College Credit for Writing**

**Prepared by**

**Kristine Hansen, Committee Chair**

**Jeffrey Andelora**

**Heidi Estrem**

**Clint Gardner**

**Joseph Janangelo**

**Susan Miller-Cochran**

**September 2013**

**Table of Contents**

Preamble .....1

The FYW Course .....3

    Curriculum.....3

    Student Readiness .....4

    Instructors.....4

    Recommendation.....4

The Advanced Placement Option .....5

    Curriculum.....5

    Student Readiness .....6

    Instructors.....6

    Recommendation.....6

The International Baccalaureate Option.....7

    Curriculum.....7

    Student Readiness .....7

    Instructors.....8

    Recommendation.....8

The Concurrent Enrollment/Dual Credit Option.....8

    Curriculum.....9

    Student Readiness .....10

    Instructors.....10

    Recommendation.....11

Conclusion.....12

## CWPA Position Statement on Pre-College Credit for Writing

### Preamble

The Council of Writing Program Administrators (hereafter CWPA) is an organization that advocates for best practices in the teaching of writing in postsecondary institutions. Courses offered in writing programs include, but are not limited to, the first-year writing (FYW) course, a course that is almost universally required in two- and four-year North American colleges. FYW is a course that, among other things, introduces newly matriculated college students to the academic writing they will do in their college years. Colleges may require only one course in writing or as many as four or five. FYW at many institutions is a two-semester course sequence, and it may be followed by required or recommended writing courses in subsequent years.

Increasingly, high school students have several options for attempting to demonstrate that they have completed the FYW requirement prior to matriculating at college, including these:

- **Advanced Placement.** First developed in the mid-1950s, the Advanced Placement (AP) program sponsored by the College Board, recommends on the basis of certain test scores that students are qualified to be exempted from the FYW course, and it encourages colleges to grant students credit for FYW on the basis of students' scores on an AP test.
- **International Baccalaureate.** Available since the late 1960s, the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma, aims, in part, to develop in students the kind of skill in writing and other subjects that the first year of college traditionally has imparted; many colleges grant waivers to holders of IB diplomas for various first-year courses, including writing. IB is still a rather small program in North America, with only 924 high schools in the US and Canada participating in 2013.
- **Concurrent Enrollment.** Begun in the 1970s, concurrent enrollment (CE) or dual credit (DC) is also sometimes called "college in the schools" or "postsecondary enrollment." The DC/CE option has grown enormously in the last 20 years, with student enrollments now outpacing those in AP courses. In a DC/CE writing course, typically offered in a high school and taught by a high school teacher who has been appointed by the college sponsoring the course, students complete both high school graduation requirements and the FYW requirement in one and the same course.

Because of the pervasiveness of these pre-college options for earning college credit in writing and because of concerns about their equivalency to the FYW courses students take on college campuses, CWPA offers this public position statement regarding AP, IB, and CE courses.

First, CWPA notes that, because of local variability, it is impossible to take a single position on whether or not high school students should avail themselves of AP, IB, and DC/CE courses. Second, CWPA cannot dictate whether colleges and universities should grant credit for any or all of these pre-college offerings. So much depends on context and on the participants and the nature of any pre-college curriculum that decisions must be made locally. Therefore, this position statement provides information, guidelines, and resources that individual stakeholders can turn to in order to make sound judgments about (1) the advisability of students enrolling in pre-college options that are meant to substitute for a college FYW course, and (2) granting or accepting waivers and credit for those options in place of FYW.

CWPA has written this position statement with many audiences in mind. Those who have a stake in decisions about pre-college credit in writing include the following:

- Students
- Parents and other custodians
- High school English teachers
- High school principals
- Local school boards
- Prospective and current college writing teachers
- College writing program administrators, including directors of writing centers and writing-across-the-curriculum programs
- College admissions and enrollment management officers
- College deans and presidents
- Boards of regents or trustees for colleges
- State departments of education
- State legislatures and governors
- The US Department of Education
- Independent, non-governmental think tanks and non-profit organizations that aim to influence educational policy (e.g., Achieve, the American Youth Policy Forum, the Institute for Educational Leadership, Jobs for the Future, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, the National Center for Educational Accountability)
- Future employers, who will expect college graduates to be competent, versatile writers in careers that increasingly demand advanced writing abilities

With so many stakeholders interested in the issue, the CWPA recommendations below are based on a careful examination of how the options of AP, IB, and CE compare to typical FYW courses in three important areas:

1. Curriculum
2. Student Readiness
3. Instructors

Stakeholders may use the descriptions given for the curriculum, student readiness, and instructors in FYW to compare with descriptions of the same factors in the pre-college options of AP, IB, and DC/CE.

This statement is informed by the following two statements that have been developed and published or co-published by CWPA about the learning outcomes and habits of mind a strong FYW course should produce. Stakeholders are encouraged to read these documents:

- *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition* (available at <http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>)
- *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (available at <http://wpacouncil.org/framework>; developed in collaboration with the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Writing Project)

In the interest of brevity, many of the points made below are not developed in detail, nor are research citations given for much of the scholarship that underlies the generalizations. An annotated bibliography of relevant sources will be made available at the CWPA website in 2014.

## **The FYW Course**

Many stakeholders, as they imagine what FYW includes, may think back to the “freshman English” course they took in college. But today’s FYW course has evolved far beyond the courses of yesteryear. It is an introductory course within a particular general education program at each college or university that performs a unique function in the lives of newly matriculated students. With an enrollment of 15-25 students per section, FYW is likely to be the only small course (or one of only a few) that new students take in their first year—and one of only a few courses in which the teacher learns the students’ names and interacts personally with them, conferring with them about drafts and giving them detailed feedback on their writing. FYW is often part of an integrated network of courses identified (officially or unofficially) as part of the “first-year experience,” which is designed to help new students enter the culture of the specific college or university the student has chosen to attend. These first-year courses, together with support services often attached to them (e.g., writing centers and information literacy courses), are developed deliberately and intentionally, and their purpose is to help emerging adults undertake the university-level study of writing and develop the habits of mind and skills that will make them independent learners.

In this context, FYW has frequently become a course in which students learn to read and to produce the kinds of discourse used in university disciplines. The course is designed to take advantage of a unique curricular moment, giving students carefully designed experiences in reading and writing that cause them to reflect seriously on the ways that advanced literacy skills lead to success in college and in the many professions that accomplish much of their work through writing. The FYW course may also be part of an institution’s writing-across-the-curriculum program, the first step in a planned progression of reading and writing experiences which recognize that students’ abilities must “not only diversify along disciplinary and professional lines but also move into whole new levels where expected outcomes expand, multiply, and diverge” (see WPA Outcomes Statement).

### Curriculum

The curriculum of FYW is writing itself—the subject and the activity—and it is designed by experts and aligned with research. These experts are familiar with the institutional mission of the college where they work and the place that advanced reading and writing skills have in that mission. While the content of the course shifts depending on the particular university or college context, the FYW course or course sequence is often the first time that students have studied writing as a subject of research and as a set of practices that they might hone and deepen. The FYW course has carefully specified outcomes; many writing programs, whether within English Departments or independent, conduct regular assessments to ensure that these outcomes enable students’ success beyond the first-year course.

The books and other teaching materials chosen for FYW courses are up-to-date and reflect the current best thinking and best practices in the teaching of writing as determined by scholars in the field of writing studies. For example, the assignments students complete give them experience in writing for varied purposes and audiences in many different genres and in contemporary media. The assignments also incorporate students’ experiences and thinking from participation in discussions, reading about current issues and great ideas, and listening to stimulating lectures that add value to the FYW course. The day-to-day instruction emphasizes formulating valid claims and supporting the claims with strong evidence and arguments, using recursive processes of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and evaluating writing—including peer review, teacher conferences, and writing center tutorials. Instruction includes composing with online tools to locate and evaluate sources of information; then incorporating the information according to scholarly and ethical guidelines to avoid plagiarism; and finally designing

and formatting the information for user-friendly reading. The curriculum undergoes constant review and is updated and improved on a regular basis.

### Student Readiness

Student readiness for FYW is determined locally by carefully designed placement practices. These might include a combination of measures, including writing samples, self-assessment, high school grades and/or standardized test scores (including SAT and ACT scores). Some colleges have more than one FYW course, and students are placed into the one that they appear most ready to succeed in. They will explore writing, rhetoric, and research strategies appropriate to their level in the college's curriculum and be introduced to the expectations of their particular college or university. They will be prepared for the next step in their institution's curriculum in literacy as well as for other courses that require critical thinking, research skills, and strong writing abilities.

### Instructors

The credentials and experience of FYW instructors vary from institution to institution. In some (especially large research institutions), many FYW classes are taught by graduate students and part-time faculty, not PhD-holding, full-time professors; in other institutions (especially small liberal arts colleges), nearly all of the classes are taught by full-time faculty. Because of the labor-intensive nature of teaching writing, classes in FYW are usually kept small, so many teachers must be hired to staff all the sections offered, and most institutions find it impossible to staff them all with full-time teachers. Part-time faculty members typically hold MA or MFA degrees, and some have PhDs; graduate students are in the process of earning MA, MFA, and PhD degrees.

Most institutions now have a writing program administrator (WPA) or at least a faculty member whose duties include directing the work of all the instructors who deliver the curriculum. As a result, in the last 30 years, FYW courses have been staffed by instructors who are better prepared for their assignments and better supervised in their work than previously in the history of FYW courses. Pre-service and in-service training are widely required for part-time faculty; more formal course work is now the norm for graduate student instructors. Class visits and evaluations by the WPA and other faculty are standard, as are routine assessments of teaching performance prior to the issuing of a new contract. In fairness, however, it must be said that the material conditions under which some FYW instructors work are not ideal. At some institutions, instructors are underpaid and overworked, teaching five or more sections (i.e., 120 or more students per semester), without adequate office space to confer with students. CWPA and other professional organizations (e.g., the Conference on College Composition and Communication, National Council of Teachers of English, and Modern Language Association) are constantly striving to improve the working conditions of FYW instructors.

### Recommendation

Stakeholders evaluating whether new students should enroll in a given institution's FYW course should investigate the unique aims, curricular design, and staffing of the writing program, not simply to determine whether it meets high standards, but also to learn whether it helps students acquire the habits of mind and ways of behaving in a democratic society that will allow them to function effectively in the academy and later in careers and public life. CWPA notes that, on balance, taking the FYW course at the institution where a student matriculates can confer significant advantages to the new college student, since the course is likely to provide a significant form of enculturation—not only intellectual but social and emotional—into the new world of postsecondary education and the early years of an autonomous adulthood. CWPA cautions stakeholders to remember that writing is not merely an



instrumental skill that can easily be acquired once and for all at a young age, like learning to ride a bicycle. Rather, writing is one of the most important cultural practices in the age we live in, a practice that can be central in developing many dimensions of the student's life—academic, personal, interpersonal, civic, ethical, moral, and spiritual, as well as professional. Accordingly, choosing the optimum course in writing instruction for a given student should not be a matter of determining how to earn a few required credits in the cheapest and quickest way possible, but a matter of how to gain the most value at the right time and place in the student's education.

### **The Advanced Placement Option**

The Advanced Placement program in English was created by the College Board in 1954. It took the form of a test administered to elite prep school students who were bound for Ivy League colleges in order to determine which students among this already selective group could be exempted from typical freshman English courses of that era and move directly into advanced literature courses. Since AP's inception, the College Board has worked aggressively to offer AP programs and now "pre-AP" programs in thousands of high schools in the US and abroad. There are two AP English tests, one in English Literature and Composition and the other in English Language and Composition, each of which cost \$87 to take in 2012. The two tests are quite similar. First, each asks a series of multiple-choice questions that students have 60 minutes to complete. In the literature exam, these questions focus largely on the formal features of canonical works of literature; in the language exam, they focus on formal properties of rhetoric that can be identified in written texts. The computer-scored multiple-choice section of each test comprises 45 percent of the student's grade. Second, both exams pose a set of three "free-response" questions requiring students to handwrite timed, impromptu essays in 120 minutes. The three human-scored essays account for 55 percent of the grade. The essay prompts for the literature exam ask students to analyze literary works. In contrast, the essay prompts for the language exam require students to analyze the rhetoric of a passage; to construct their own argument about a broad issue; and to synthesize a few provided sources into a mini-research paper (for this essay, students have an additional 15 minutes to read the sources).

Students' scores on the multiple-choice and essay sections are converted by ETS statisticians into a single composite score using a 1-5 scale. The College Board advises colleges that a score of 5 means a student is "extremely well qualified" for advanced college work; 4 means a student is "well-qualified"; 3, "qualified"; 2, "possibly qualified"; and 1, "no recommendation." Generally, students take an AP course in order to prepare for the tests, but they can take a test without taking the corresponding course (and they can take the courses without taking the corresponding test). Since 2010, more students have taken the language exam than the literature exam, probably because more institutions are now permitting exemptions from FYW for the language exam. At the same time, fewer postsecondary institutions now allow exemptions from FYW for the literature exam on the grounds that it does not compare well to FYW.

### Curriculum

The College Board has never attempted to specify a curriculum that teachers must follow to prepare students for either of the two AP tests. Since 2007, the College Board has required AP teachers to submit a syllabus for their course so that it could be audited as a quality control measure. The syllabi are no guarantee, however, of what actually happens in AP courses. The long-standing US tradition of teaching American literature in the junior year of high school and teaching British literature in the senior year impacts the curriculum of an AP course, particularly the course that prepares students for the AP Language and Composition test, which most students take in their junior year. Because state curriculum

mandates often require American literature to be taught in the junior year, many high school AP courses that are ostensibly preparing students for the Language and Composition exam are actually focused mainly on American literature with some attention given to teaching the formal features of rhetoric.

As a result, the curriculum of an AP course is not comparable to that of the typical college FYW course. Nor is it usually a good match in terms of the practice in writing that students receive. In order to do well on the AP test, students in an AP course receive extensive practice in performing timed writing. The genre of writing most practiced in an AP course is the short formulaic essay, typically a five-paragraph essay, not the variety of genres aimed at in the typical FYW course. Writing processes emphasized in FYW—planning, drafting, revising with peer and teacher review, and editing—are typically given short shrift in AP. Finding and evaluating the quality of library and Internet sources for an original argument that synthesizes the scholarship on an issue is likewise not a major part of the AP curriculum because there is no time for researched writing on the AP exam. While the Language and Composition exam requires students to synthesize a handful of already provided quotations in one of the three 40-minute essays, this exercise only demonstrates whether students can read and summarize sources, not find and evaluate them to compose an original argument. And because the College Board requires that the AP test essays be handwritten, composing using a computer and online tools is not emphasized in AP courses as it is in typical FYW courses.

### Student Readiness

Many high school students now take both AP tests. Typically, they take the English Language and Composition exam in their junior year, when they are 16-17 years old, and they take the English Literature and Composition in their senior year, when they are aged 17-18. They are, in fact, younger at the time they take the language test, the exam which more colleges now allow as a substitute for FYW. This fact raises these significant questions: Should FYW credit be given for short, formulaic timed writing the student did two years prior to matriculating at college? If a student bypasses FYW on the strength of such a small amount of writing—even if it was rated highly by test scorers—might they be missing out on the developmental and socializing effects of more writing and of writing assignments that are designed for the curricular moment when they matriculate at college?

### Instructors

Teaching AP courses can be seen as a choice assignment. Usually, the most experienced, most effective, most dedicated teachers are given the opportunity to work with the unusually motivated students who choose AP courses. With their heavy student loads, high school AP teachers may give up personal time in order to grade student writing, especially timed writing, as they prepare students for the exam. Some AP teachers also assign other kinds of writing in addition to timed writing, including research writing. However, the main focus of most AP courses is on reading and analyzing literary and other texts rather than on the production of writing in varied genres and media. The training and experience that high school teachers receive in conjunction with these courses and the goals of the courses are usually not the same as those associated with FYW courses.

### Recommendation

Stakeholders evaluating AP as a substitute for FYW would do well to consider that colleges are increasingly not giving exemptions for AP scores of 3 and for the AP Literature and Composition exam. Sometimes colleges will give students credit hours for AP scores, but not specify any particular course that the credit hours cover. CWPA recognizes that rigorous AP courses are valuable in their own right because they require students to meet high expectations and they contribute much to the knowledge

and maturation of students. CWPA therefore highly recommends that students enroll in AP courses. But CWPA questions whether AP tests are valid indicators that students are prepared to bypass FYW and does not recommend that students take AP English tests in order to try to exchange their AP scores for FYW credit.

### **The International Baccalaureate Option**

The International Baccalaureate (IB) was established in 1968 in Geneva, Switzerland, to prepare students for international mobility in higher education. To accomplish this goal, IB provides secondary schools with a curriculum and a diploma recognized by colleges and universities around the world. Seeking to make an IB education available to students at all levels—primary, middle, and secondary—it currently serves over a million students in more than 3,000 schools in nearly 150 countries. In 2012 its Diploma Programme (DP), for students aged 16-19, was offered in 2,378 schools worldwide, 927 of those in the US and Canada. Schools that want to offer the DP must complete a strenuous application process; after authorization, they are evaluated every 5 years to ensure they continue to meet IB’s high standards. The DP is an integrated six-part, two-year curriculum capped by the “extended essay,” a 4,000-word composition on a subject of the student’s choosing, that demonstrates their ability to do research and college-level writing. Students are examined in their writing and other abilities by external examiners hired and trained by the IB to ensure “international parity.” Students who earn the IB diploma with highest scores are often able to complete their undergraduate degrees in fewer than four years; for instance, they can complete a bachelor’s degree in three years at Harvard University. At Oregon State University students with top IB scores are guaranteed automatic admission and a year of college credit as well as a generous scholarship, renewable if they maintain a 3.0 GPA. Though IB programs are not yet widespread in North America, they hold much promise for adding rigor and challenge to the typical high school curriculum. Participation in the IB Diploma Programme is not free, however; parents will typically pay \$600 or more per year for their child to participate in the curriculum and take the whole array of required tests.

#### Curriculum

The IB Diploma Programme curriculum has six integrated parts: first language (called A1), an acquired language (called A2), individuals and societies, experimental science, mathematics and computer science, and the arts. At the center of the curriculum is a three-part experience each student completes: an interdisciplinary “theory of knowledge” course exploring the nature of knowledge across disciplines and encouraging respect for other cultural perspectives; a “creativity, action, and service” experience engaging students in artistic pursuits, sports, and community service outside the school. Writing is central to every subject in the curriculum, and teachers use writing process pedagogy—planning, drafting, getting feedback, revising, and editing—to teach students to produce writing in many genres. In the theory of knowledge course students produce a “theory of knowledge” essay, which figures largely in the overall assessment of ability and accomplishment. The culminating paper is the 4,000-word “extended essay,” a research paper that synthesizes a good portion of what the student has learned. As a result, students who come to college with an IB diploma, have done much more writing than high school students usually do, and the writing is much more substantial and varied than just a few short papers analyzing literature or timed essays.

#### Student Readiness

The IB program is clearly for unusually motivated and bright students. However, the high fees often establish a barrier to entry for low income students. Some financial assistance in the form of

scholarships and federal and state grants is available to such students. Also, students can take individual IB courses instead of the entire DP curriculum; they can earn IB certificates for each subject area in which they are examined, but they have to pay for each exam they take. Other than being at least 16 years old, there are no formal prerequisites for enrolling in an IB course. Thus, it is largely up to students and their parents—influenced possibly by advice from teachers—to decide whether the full IB Diploma Programme or individual IB courses meet students’ needs, aptitudes, and desires. If their high school has an IB program in place, students seeking a challenging path through high school are likely to desire to participate.

### Instructors

Teachers in an IB program are carefully chosen and trained to be part of the team that offers the DP curriculum. Assessment of students’ success is not entirely in the instructors’ purview, however. Teachers’ evaluations of students’ homework, projects, notebooks, and labs typically account for 20 percent of students’ grades. The other 80 percent is determined by the external examiners who are hired and trained by the IB. Instructors thus become more like coaches helping the students prepare for the exams. The external examiners evaluate students’ theory of knowledge essays and extended essays and score their exams in each subject, awarding scores from 1 (“poor”) to 7 (“excellent”). Because the external grading is intended to be objective, valid, and reliable across time and place, it is criterion-based not norm-referenced. Students who score at least 4 in all six parts of the curriculum, thus achieving a minimum of 24 points, are awarded the IB diploma. (Students who score below 24 may still get IB certificates for each subject area examined.)

Recommendation: CWPA believes that the IB experience is likely the most rigorous and challenging path students can take through high school. No one part of the IB curriculum is comparable to FYW; however, because the IB experience includes frequent, varied, and extended writing assignments and essay exams, as a whole it could be considered strong evidence that students have worked to develop the same competency in writing that is aimed at in FYW. CWPA recommends more study of the college success of IB students who have been exempted from FYW; it also recommends that writing program administrators examine the writing IB students have done in high school as they make placement decisions. Furthermore, it is recommended that local writing program administrators be involved in their respective college’s decisions about awarding credit for FYW on the basis of IB performance.

### **The Concurrent Enrollment/Dual Credit Option**

Since the 1970s, the terms “concurrent enrollment” and “dual credit” have been used to describe various programs across the nation that allow students to enroll in college courses while in high school. (Sometimes the terms “dual enrollment” and “concurrent credit” are used, as well as “postsecondary enrollment options” and “college in the schools.” Since concurrent enrollment and dual credit seem to be the most common names, this document will refer to the option as DC/CE.) Whatever the name used, the idea is the same: high school students enroll in a course that meets requirements for graduation from high school *and* nets them college credit for FYW if they successfully complete the course. The college credit comes from the postsecondary institution that agrees to have its FYW course taught in the high schools or to high school students who take it by coming to a campus or through a distance learning arrangement. According to 2002-03 data from the National Center for Education Statistics, 74 percent of CE courses were taught at high schools, 23 percent on campuses of postsecondary institutions (usually by college faculty teaching high school students who commuted to the campus), and almost 4 percent via distance education. However they are offered, DC/CE courses are

intended to address the concern that high school curricula are not rigorous enough and not preparing students to be “college-ready.”

The recent explosive growth of the DC/CE option is in part fueled by the concerns of state legislatures and other education policy makers, who want to

- encourage more high school students to pursue higher education so that they will be better prepared to work in the globalized economy of the Information Age;
- build effective bridges between high school and college so that students make smooth and rewarding transitions from secondary to postsecondary instruction;
- spend public funds for higher education wisely by finding ways to maintain or cut costs while educating more students effectively.

The DC/CE option seems to address all three of these concerns. A small body of research shows that students who enroll in DC/CE tend to enroll in college and to persist toward college graduation; these results seem particularly pronounced for students from low-income families.<sup>1</sup> The cost of acquiring college credit through the DC/CE option is generally lower than what a student would pay for the same credit while attending college. In some states, legislatures have offered incentives to get students to take DC/CE courses by offering to pay all or part of the costs involved. CWPA is sympathetic to these concerns, but urges stakeholders to use the information below to consider whether a given DC/CE option is equivalent to a typical FYW course offered at a college to a fully matriculated student.

### Curriculum

It is difficult to generalize about the curriculum of all DC/CE courses. The original conception was that the curriculum of a particular college’s FYW course would be offered to high school students, but the curriculum that is actually delivered is not always “pure.” Depending on the relationship and existing agreements between the host college and the high school, as well as on the resources the college devotes to its DC/CE program, the DC/CE curriculum in a high school may or may not be similar to the FYW curriculum at the college that grants the credit for the course. Some DC/CE programs scrupulously seek to maintain congruence between the high school and college versions of the courses: They follow the same curriculum and pedagogical methods; they use the same textbooks; the college offering the credit trains the high school teachers in the goals and methods of the course; and, ideally, the college sends liaisons periodically to observe, to consult, and to supervise delivery of the curriculum. In these well-run programs ongoing evaluation ensures that the DC/CE courses are equivalent to the FYW course in every respect.

However, other DC/CE programs are marked by many alterations that occur as high schools use limited resources to meet state curriculum mandates and legislative requirements to offer DC/CE courses. One course may be used to try to achieve the goals of two or three different mandates or programs. For example, some high schools offer DC/CE credit for one or both of their AP courses, Language and Composition or Literature and Composition, even though the object of study and the writing assignments in AP courses, as described above, are very different from those in most FYW courses. Some high schools simply offer their regular senior English course, and some of the students enrolled in it take the course for DC/CE credit while other students do not. The curriculum in such courses does not take into account the local considerations that the best FYW courses (described above) can.

The implications of this variability are unsettling. Even though high school students may not have actually had a college FYW course, once the DC/CE credit goes on a college transcript, it is very difficult

to tell that they have not had the real thing. College credit is usually widely transferable because of the vast network of articulation agreements between all kinds of two-year and four-year institutions across the nation. A student in a small rural high school may take a standard high school English literature course that one sponsoring postsecondary institution is willing to call DC/CE, and the student can transfer the credit and be exempted from FYW upon matriculation at a second postsecondary institution. Admissions officials and writing program administrators at the second institution will generally not be able to tell that the student did not actually take the FYW course of the first institution.

### Student Readiness

According to the Education Commission of the States,<sup>ii</sup> the requirements high school students must meet to be eligible to enroll in a DC/CE course vary widely from state to state. Some states specify a minimum GPA, test scores, and/or written recommendations from teachers and other school officials. Fifteen states reserve DC/CE for twelfth graders only; 20 allow eleventh graders to participate; 2 allow tenth graders; and 9 states permit—but don't necessarily encourage—ninth graders to enroll. The remaining states apparently have no policy on student eligibility.

When students are still minors—especially as young as 14, 15, or even 16—concerns arise about their readiness for an FYW course that is designed for students on a college campus, who are typically 18 and 19. Designers of college FYW courses generally plan the curriculum to challenge emancipated young adults who should be ready for the rhetorically challenging and perhaps morally and ethically challenging texts that are often a part of FYW. When such course content is taught to teens in high school who are still minors, their lack of life experiences and readiness to confront some of the questions addressed in college FYW courses could spell trouble. Parents of high school students may object to the content of the curriculum since their children are still under their control. If students who are minors go to a nearby college campus and take an FYW course with students who are older, perhaps by ten years or more, parents and administrators may have additional concerns about the wisdom of mixing students of such disparate ages and stages of maturity.<sup>iii</sup>

Even when students are taught in their own high school, questions arise about the disparity between the cultures of high school and college. Teens as young as 14, 15, 16, or even 17 might be taught in high schools to produce correct, competent writing commensurate with their stage of cognitive maturity, but can it accurately be called college writing? The high school DC/CE course may become an entity that is neither fish nor fowl. In high school, sporting events and other extracurricular activities may interrupt or even cancel classes—even ones being taught for college credit. Failing high school students usually can't drop a course as they can in college. College teachers usually don't allow make-up work, but high school teachers are often required to. Because parents have more say in the lives of their minor children, they are allowed to see their educational records. But the FERPA law (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) allows students who are either 18 or enrolled in a postsecondary institution to restrict access to their educational records. DC/CE students appear to be in the gray area of this law: Are they high school or college students? Can parents and the high school view their DC/CE course records? These questions are not answered the same way in every state or institution.

### Instructors

Just as there is wide variability in the curriculum of DC/CE courses, there is among instructors of the courses as well. The instructor of a DC/CE course may be employed by the college sponsoring the course, someone who perhaps teaches the FYW course on the college campus and also travels to local high schools to teach the same course or teaches it via distance learning. In such a case, concerns about

teacher qualifications and training to deliver the curriculum do not generally arise. However, most DC/CE courses are taught by high school teachers. In best case scenarios, these high school teachers will have been hired because they have the right education and credentials to be teachers of writing; they will also have been given some pre-service training to become acquainted with the textbooks and other materials, the curriculum, the writing assignments and exams, and the pedagogical methods the sponsoring college requires for its FYW course; and they will be regularly visited, observed, evaluated, and invited to in-service activities to continue their professional development as teachers of writing.

Sometimes, however, high school teachers of DC/CE courses have less training or experience with FYW courses. They may be handed the college's syllabus for FYW but choose materials and develop assignments (and/or exams, not often used in FYW) on their own, or in conjunction with other mandates described above such as AP practices and state standards. Since the college coursework required of most high school teachers is typically focused on secondary instruction (and not postsecondary teaching), they may not be aware of research in the field of composition studies that informs FYW.

### Recommendation

For the reasons given above, CWPA urges parents and other custodians to perform due diligence before choosing to enroll students in a DC/CE course, and postsecondary institutions to carefully examine materials before granting an exemption from and credit for FYW on the basis of a student's high school experience in what was called a DC/CE course. One appropriate way to exercise this diligence is to determine whether the DC/CE course is part of a program accredited by the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). NACEP was organized in 1999 to develop national accreditation standards for DC/CE courses. NACEP restricts its definition of DC/CE to college courses taught during the usual school day in high schools by high school teachers selected and prepared by partnering colleges; it is not concerned with courses in which college teachers go to the high school to teach, courses that high school students take at a nearby college, and AP and IB courses. NACEP's goal is to certify that college courses offered in high schools are as rigorous as those offered by the sponsoring college. To that end, NACEP has 17 accreditation standards, categorized in five areas—curriculum, faculty, students, assessment and program evaluation—all of which emphasize that DC/CE students are to be taught and treated the same as fully matriculated college students. These standards cannot be met quickly; a CE program must be in place for five years to gather assessment data before it seeks accreditation. As of April 2013, only 89 programs across the nation had achieved NACEP accreditation.

However, it must be noted that even programs with NACEP certification may not produce the outcomes in writing desired by a particular institution. Colleges and universities may still want to investigate exactly what students did in their DC/CE course. Some guidelines useful in assessing the parity between a particular DC/CE course and a college FYW course may be found in the Statement on Dual Credit/Concurrent Enrollment Composition: Policy and Best Practices, available at <http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/dualcredit>. This statement was adopted in November 2012 by the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and it offers guidelines that should be met in order for CCCC "to support dual credit/concurrent enrollment composition" so that the "needs of student writers at all points in their development" are properly addressed and "the rights of teachers and writing program administrators" are protected.

The Two-Year College Association has also published an Executive Committee Statement on Concurrent Enrollment, urging attention to quality control, the environment on the high school campus, and the cognitive and affective readiness of high school students for college learning, along with policies for involving parents, supporting high school faculty, and assigning college grades to high school students.

The TYCA statement is available at  
[http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Groups/TYCA/Concurrent\\_Enrollment.pdf](http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Groups/TYCA/Concurrent_Enrollment.pdf)

## **Conclusion**

CWPA stands ready to cooperate with other stakeholders in discussing the best ways to design a coherent K-16 curriculum in writing and reading that is commensurate with the level of young people's cognitive, emotional, and social development at each stage of their education. This discussion should include how to best prepare teachers to deliver such a curriculum in a way that achieves the outcomes that will best serve students as they mature and the eventual goals and needs of our democratic society.

In the meantime, the Council of Writing Program Administrators believes that thoughtful deliberations should precede decisions about enrolling young people between 14 and 18 years of age in what are called "college-level writing courses." As this position statement shows, not all of the three main pre-college credit options—AP, IB, and DC/CE—compare well with FYW in terms of these three factors:

1. curriculum
2. student readiness
3. instructors

CWPA believes that enrolling students in substitutes for FYW probably does them a disservice when the substitutes do not compare well to FYW in curriculum, student readiness, and teacher preparation and supervision. CWPA therefore urges postsecondary institutions to exercise diligence in examining the curriculum, assignments, written work, test scores, and other evidence that students present upon entering college to claim that they already have had an experience equivalent to FYW.

Because writing is such an important activity in the information age and the global economy we live in, CWPA strongly encourages schools at all levels to find ways to offer more writing instruction to students, rather than to find ways to compress or eliminate it at one level or another. Moreover, CWPA questions whether the current trend of accelerating young people's education is an unmitigated good. Introducing more and more so-called "college-level learning" into high schools may short circuit the normal intellectual, social, and emotional development that high school courses have traditionally provided students and thus prevent those students from having the first-year college experiences that are critical to their adapting to the new culture of college and developing the habits of mind that the first-year experience aims at.

When 18-year-olds arrive in college with the equivalent of an associate's degree, they could, presumably, qualify for a bachelor's degree by the age of twenty. CWPA asks stakeholders to consider whether the purpose of a college education is to make it possible for students to graduate as quickly as possible by amassing enough credit hours from disparate sources or whether it is to produce thoughtful, well-rounded, highly literate and humane people who are prepared to take their place in professions and in civic life. CWPA's position is that all who have a stake in answering these questions should look carefully at the pre-college credit industry and determine whether participation in AP, IB, or DC/CE produces the outcomes and habits of mind that we all want students to demonstrate both while they are in college and at the time they earn their degree. It may be that pre-college options are highly valuable to high school students' educational development but should be considered as preparation, not substitutes, for strong FYW courses taken on the campus where each student matriculates.



---

<sup>i</sup> Barnett, Elisabeth and Catherine Hughes. "Issue Brief: Community College and High School Partnerships." 2010. Web. 3 September 2012.

<sup>ii</sup> The Education Commission of the States (ECS) is an interstate compact created in 1965 to improve public education by facilitating the exchange of information, ideas and experiences among state policymakers and education leaders. As a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization involves key leaders from all levels of the education system. Forty-nine states, three territories and the District of Columbia constitute the commission's current membership. Each member state or territory is represented by seven commissioners—the governor and six other individuals, typically legislators, chief state school officers, state and local school board members, superintendents, higher education officials and business leaders. (See [http://www.ecs.org/html/aboutECS/home\\_aboutECS.htm](http://www.ecs.org/html/aboutECS/home_aboutECS.htm))

<sup>iii</sup> For a discussion of these concerns, see Barbara Schneider, "Early College High Schools: Double-Time" in *College Credit for Writing in High School: The "Taking Care of" Business*. Eds. Kristine Hansen and Christine R. Farris. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2010.