

## Contesting the Space between High School and College in the Era of Dual-Enrollment

Howard Tinberg

Bristol Community College

Jean-Paul Nadeau

Bristol Community College

### NCTE and the Problem of “College Readiness”

The space between high schools and colleges has been a site of contention for at least a century. Indeed, as Erika Lindemann detailed in the February 2011 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, NCTE began in 1911 as a protest against the heavy hand of elite colleges determined to impose uniform lists of reading on high school English curricula. These elite colleges viewed high schools as purely preparatory for postsecondary advancement. Entrance examinations, initiated by universities and based on the uniform lists, were seen

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by some as an attempt by colleges to control the content of high school curriculum (Applebee 51). In the East, particularly, the examinations were viewed as heavy-handed—indeed, in Fred Newton Scott’s view—even “feudal” (qtd. in Applebee 50). In response to protests voiced by New York high school teachers, the English Round Table of the Secondary Division of the National Education Association convened in December of 1911 to consider the entrance requirements. From that committee’s work came a call for a National Council of Teachers of English, whose charge was to “reflect and render effective the will of the various local associations

and of individual teachers, and, by securing concert of action, greatly improve the conditions surrounding English work” (qtd. in Applebee 52).

A century later, the terrain between high school and college has again become contested. Once again, high schools are under fire for not adequately preparing students to succeed. This time, however, the forces for conformity emanate not from the colleges alone so much as from government and private entities. The federal government, through its “Race to the Top” initiative, has called for a transformation of the public schools, K–12, so that students will,

in the words of President Obama, “out-compete any worker, anywhere in the world” (“Fact Sheet”).

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, an example of a private organization taking on the challenge of reforming public secondary education, uses language far more judgmental than was seen in NCTE’s early days or by the current administration:

It is time to rethink the purpose and structure of the American high school. Today’s large comprehensive high schools are obsolete; they prepare a privileged fraction of students for college while placing many students on tracks to nowhere. (5)

Moreover, studies provide compelling evidence of the schools’ failure to prepare students for a knowledge economy:

- roughly 80 percent of students entering ninth grade fail to graduate college by the age of twenty-four (Krueger 1)
- among high school graduates who go on to college, a quarter need to take at least one remedial course in their first year (Bill and Melinda Gates 5–6)
- twelfth-grade students are producing writing that is “relatively immature and unsophisticated,” according to the National Commission on Writing (20).

In the new century, calls to promote “college readiness” among high school students have accelerated to a degree that would have astonished even these privileged and powerful colleges of the past. The most conspicuous evidence for such acceleration is the increasing popularity among schools, students, and colleges alike of dual-credit programs, opportunities for high school students to enroll in college-level courses (whether at the high school or at the college). Such programs are intended to provide high school students with a jump start on their college experience and thus, it is argued, motivate students to continue with their high school experience while at the same time send them on their way toward eventual graduation from college. Such programs also provide parents with savings on college costs since in some cases (Advanced Placement) success translates into a waiver of a college course or public funding of the course itself. And as evidence of their popularity, it’s worth noting that in the 2002–2003 academic year, 70 percent of high schools and more than half of this country’s postsecondary institutions allowed high school students to

take college courses (Karp et al., *Postsecondary* 2). In that year, over 800,000 secondary students took at least one college-credit course (2).

It is our contention that while dual-enrollment programs have been shown to have a positive effect on the persistence of some students and on their decision to continue onto college, such programs have not been proven

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to enhance student learning. Indeed, studies on the academic performance of high school students in dual-enrollment programs have begun to raise alarm, both as to students' readiness to benefit in the college classroom and to the lack of consistent oversight given to the curriculum to which these students are exposed.

In the light of such concerns, we argue that the National Council of Teachers of English—whose members extend from K through 16—will have an important role to play to provide a much needed bridge between the worlds that dual-enrolled students inhabit. Specifically, we urge NCTE and its college associations to strike partnerships with agencies that study and promote dual-enrollment programs and to assist in the formulation of policy that promotes not only student persistence in college but enhanced student literacies.

### **Appealing to NCTE's and CCC's Core Values**

We take our cue from "NCTE Core Values," a statement whose expressed respect for diversity of background and expertise fosters the kind of collegiality necessary for dual enrollment to succeed (National Council). Moreover, we note NCTE's privileging of advocacy: "Together and with NCTE's leadership, teachers can collectively and individually influence educational policy and legislation so that it is based upon what is known about language and learning" (National Council). It is imperative, we believe, that those schools and colleges entering into dual-enrollment initiatives do so with full understanding of their impact on students' learning and, specifically, emerging literate practices. Student persistence is key, no doubt, but students must flourish as well—as readers, writers, and thinkers.

Similarly, we draw inspiration from the various position statements issued by the Conference on College Composition and Communication, most notably the statement on the "Preparation and Development of Teachers of Writing," which, in addition to articulating best practices in the composition

classroom, calls for collegial exchanges with elementary and secondary teachers and with “staff of state departments of public instruction” on matters of language instruction.

We are also encouraged by recent calls within the discipline for more effective public advocacy of policy affecting literacy instruction. Charles Bazerman, for example, has pointed to “a greater need for publicly persuasive evidence to warrant our practices” (579). Four years earlier, Doug Hesse had posed two questions pertinent to our purposes here: “‘What should be the relationship of CCCC to various national initiatives on writing?’ and ‘What research, publication, or policy initiatives might CCCC pursue in order to further our mission, with a particular eye toward external constituencies?’” (373). We contend that both NCTE and CCCC need to make their voices heard on the design, implementation, and impact of dual-enrollment programs, working with both governmental and interested nongovernmental agencies. It is especially important, we argue, that NCTE and CCCC seek to partner with organizations that collect data on dual-enrollment programs, most notably the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), which we discuss below, as well as research entities assembling national data on student expectation and practices, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The ongoing collaboration between the Council of Writing Program Administrators and NSSE in data collection offers a significant precedent for such partnership (Addison and McGee).

### **A Brief History: College Credit for High School Students**

High school students can earn college credit for first-year composition in a number of ways. Kristine Hansen identifies what she refers to as “competing brands,” programs that compete with first-year composition: the International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), Early College (EC) and Concurrent Enrollment (CE).

International Baccalaureate diploma programs, originating in 1968, allow students to take a set of courses that may be accepted as credit at their postsecondary institution of choice. Nearly two thousand schools worldwide offered the program in 2008 (Hansen 13). The IB diploma is generally well regarded, including by some prestigious institutions such as Harvard University.

Advanced Placement began in the early 1950s and is still going strong today. The College Board offers the program in “more than 16,000 schools in North America,” selling “a total of 2,736,445 AP exams worldwide to 1,580,821

students” in 2008 (Hansen 18). AP students can test out of college coursework by earning a passing score on the AP exam. This program has always been intended for the most gifted students (Jones 61). Courses that prepare students for the AP exams aren’t standardized.

Early College High School programs offer students an opportunity to accelerate their final years in high school *and* their first years in college simultaneously (Hansen and Farris xxiii). An interesting note here is that student eligibility begins at fourteen years of age. Advocates respond to the question of whether high school students are too young to take college courses by referencing other such programs, such as AP, IB, and CE, as evidence that high school students aren’t too young (Jobs for the Future).

Unlike Early College High School programs, which recruit the very best students, Concurrent Enrollment is touted as an opportunity to provide a link to college for students who haven’t been top performers academically. These programs began in the 1970s and were “meant to challenge high school students who would be bored with the regular high school curriculum and [were] ready to begin college work” (Hansen 25). The National Center for Educational Statistics study indicates their current popularity: “[D]uring the 2002–3 school year there were about 1.2 million enrollments in CE courses from students in 11,700 public high schools” (25). About two-thirds of all CE courses are taught in high schools, and about a third at postsecondary institutions. A comparative handful are offered through distance learning. Some courses are taught by high school teachers and some by college faculty. Some programs where courses are given at the high school involve site visits from the sponsoring postsecondary institution; others do not.

CE models vary by region and by state, so it is difficult to paint a clear overall picture of concurrent enrollment. The most recent attempt to do so is the study by Karp et al. in 2004–5, where researchers identified which CE practices were maintained in each state and which were not (*State*). Researchers identified which states provided oversight of CE programs, what the target populations were, whether states specified admission requirements in terms of age and academics, where the programs were located, whether classes were CE only or “mixed,” who taught the courses (whether college or high school faculty), whether the content was subject to approval, who paid the tuition, and where the funding originated. The catalyst for the study seems to have been a growing interest in making CE programs available to a more diverse student body: “[G]iven current interest in expanding dual enrollment access to students

beyond the most academically advanced, this report asks the questions of how—and whether—state policies can encourage access to dual enrollment programs for a broader range of students, particularly middle- and low achieving students” (Karp et al., *State 1*).

A few years prior to this study, the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) emerged in 1999 to accredit CE courses (Hansen 27). The standards are required, per the NACEP website, only for accreditation-seeking programs where college courses are taught during the high school day by high school teachers. The NACEP claims standards are established to “promote the implementation of policies and practices to ensure that: concurrent enrollment courses offered in the high school are the same as the courses offered on-campus at the sponsoring college or university; students enrolled in concurrent enrollment courses are held to the same standards of achievement as students in on-campus courses; [and] instructors teaching college or university courses through the concurrent enrollment program meet the academic requirements for faculty and instructors teaching in the sponsoring postsecondary institution ” (National Alliance).

NACEP standards might provide some guidance in an effort to establish national standards for CE and other dual-enrollment programs. While, as Anson points out, the standards are fairly generic, they do offer a useful starting point (248). Regarding curriculum, the 2011 standards cover which courses can be offered (for example, courses must be listed in the college/university catalog and reflective of the “pedagogical, theoretical and philosophical orientation of the sponsoring college/university departments” (National Alliance). Standards covering faculty involvement describe qualifications, initial training, and ongoing professional development. Student-related standards mention registration/admittance, meeting prerequisites, and clear communication of student rights and responsibilities. In terms of the assessment standard, emphasis is on dual-enrolled students being held to the same level of expectation as college students, including grading and assessment method. Finally, the evaluation standard broadly describes how dual-enrolled students, instructors, and administrators will evaluate the course/program. Again, these standards are established within the context of high school students taking college courses taught by high school teachers during the typical high school day. Oversight of dual enrollment programs nationally would have to consider a diverse range of programs.

**What Is College-Level Writing in the Age of Dual-Enrollment?**

To be effective, dual-enrollment programs require a clear understanding among all interested parties as to the core principles, practices, and outcomes for first-year college composition. While many in the field are likely to object to such terminology, Hansen's use of the phrase "generic brand" to indicate what

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constitutes college-level composition can at the very least initiate productive conversations both within the college composition community and between that group and high school administrators and faculty who must assist in establishing dual-enrollment programs that include first-year college composition (Hansen 9). NCTE, to assist

in such conversations, has in the past decade published at least three edited collections that focus on the essential question, "What is college-level writing?" (Thompson; Sullivan and Tinberg; Sullivan, Tinberg, and Blau).

In an effort to gain a sense of what constitute current practices and beliefs in the teaching of college composition, Kathleen Yancey and Brian Morrison report on a national study, "Portraits of Composition," which surveyed nearly two thousand college writing faculty on what and how they teach:

When asked to identify one or two of their most important approaches to teaching composition, the respondents to the survey identified academic writing most often (57 percent) followed next by argument (40.9 percent). Likewise when asked what writing practices they most used, faculty identified three: writing process, revision, and peer review. (Yancey and Morrison 268)

Kristine Hansen, reinforcing the same study, provides generalizations about first-year college composition, which we paraphrase here:

- writing is at the center of the subject rather than merely a means to demonstrate understanding of literature or biology
- students write frequently, demonstrating an understanding of audience, genre conventions, and the conventions of grammar, spelling, and mechanics
- instructors typically employ "process pedagogy," which includes producing multiple drafts, peer and instructor conferencing about those drafts, and revision based upon the feedback received
- students learn to search for and use effectively scholarly sources within their writing (Hansen 10)

In addition, first-year college composition, according to outcomes set forth by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), increasingly looks to offer students opportunities at composing electronic texts. We quote this excerpt from the WPA list as to what students should learn to accomplish as digital citizens:

- Use electronic environments for drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and sharing texts
- Locate, evaluate, organize, and use research material collected from electronic sources, including scholarly library databases; other official databases (e.g., federal government databases); and informal electronic networks and internet sources
- Understand and exploit the differences in the rhetorical strategies and in the affordances available for both print and electronic composing processes and texts (Council)

Such lists of what constitutes the first-year composition “brand” are misleading, of course, because the discipline continues to evolve, calling forth a range of practices and outcomes to meet the challenge of the digital era. As Yancey and Morrison note, students will need to be adept at recognizing and producing visual qualities of documents, both print and electronic (276). In addition, they, along with John Trimbur, assert students’ need to become knowledgeable as to the ways texts, print and electronic, are formatted and circulated (Yancey and Morrison 277).

Indeed, it has been argued by many scholars (most recently by Jeanne Gunner) that any standardization of freshman writing—as in “branding”—amounts to an unsuitable “commodification” of writing itself (111). Writing then becomes reduced to a mere set of skills and disassociated from its subject and from the context—notably, the classroom, the faculty, and the assignment that the faculty generate. When a college course—a college writing course—is transplanted to a high school setting, taught, as often happens, by high school teachers, what happens in that course? Does the course not change in fundamental ways, despite best efforts to render it as a college-level experience?

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### Conflicting Pedagogies/Conflicting Cultures

In general, I would call high school writing *formulaic*. We have too many students and too little time for grading, so we often allow students to follow a formula to produce a product. (Mosley 58)

I comment on passages that seem unique to my students' voices, and I hope the comments guide them through revisions and future papers. I also mark spelling, mechanics, and usage, of course, but the emphasis is placed on passages that stimulate the reader's senses. (Lujan 45)

What should we believe about the state of writing instruction at the secondary level? We offer the two anecdotal accounts above as cautionary tales. While we suspect that Milka Mosley's account of her high school teaching experience conforms to a view commonly held by college faculty about high school writing instruction *and* accurately reflects many high school teachers' responses to the changing conditions of classrooms around the country, we could as easily point to the lively and inventive pedagogy of high school teacher Alfred Lujan (published in the same collection of essays), who places a premium on promoting expression of writers' voices and for whom examples of college-ready writing may take the form of poems or double-entry journals.

For a comprehensive look at high school writing instruction, we need to look at systematic studies done on the subject. In their study of students' perception of writing practices at four high schools in Florida, a state that has had mandated assessment of student writing for years, Lisa Scherff and Carolyn Piazza report the following:

- the most frequently assigned genre is response to literature, with writing taking place "almost every week" (286)
- a majority of students reported writing expository prose "once or twice a month" (286)
- research writing typically takes place once a year only (283)
- nearly forgotten genres include business letters and personal writing (283)
- while multiple drafts were assigned in many schools, "[t]wenty-percent across schools, grades, and tracks never went beyond a first draft" (291)
- peer revision is seldom done (293)

Interestingly, the only high school students reporting to have spent significant time on writing other than responses to literature were the dual-enrolled students taking college writing at their local community colleges (285); dual-enrolled high school students were also more likely to engage in peer revision (288–89). A recent study of high school and college faculty across the curriculum confirms many of these findings but notes that college faculty from across the curriculum are less likely to “provide opportunities for informal, exploratory writing” than do high school colleagues (Addison and McGee 157).

Complicating even further the obvious differences in composition pedagogy between high school and college instruction are the many contextual and cultural differences that exist between secondary and postsecondary institutions. Hansen puts forth many of the structural differences:

high school classes . . . may be interrupted or even canceled for activities such as sporting events and assemblies. High school teachers are often required to allow makeup work, whereas college teachers usually are not. Unlike college students, failing high school students usually can't drop a course. (29)

An additional characteristic of the cultural divide involves students' maturity level, their developmental level as both students and writers. Barbara Schneider asks: “Are students who still live at home with their parents, who are not old enough to drive cars, get married, be drafted, or go to an R-rated film without a supervising adult ready to fully participate in a university education?” (143). Early College programs, where students are involved in a more comprehensive series of courses than they may be within other dual-enrollment programs, typically include a counseling component as well as the tracking of students' academic progress. If such guidance is necessary to help students cross the bridge from high school to college, how can dual-enrollment programs operate without these features? Some supporters of EC and CE suggest that just being on a college campus is enough motivation for students. This is a troubled argument, as we've witnessed many traditional college students on our campuses who lack motivation. Clearly there must be another factor.

Chris Anson, discussing programs that allow high school students to take college-level courses, observes: “[T]hese approaches assume that some high school students are intellectually, experientially, and emotionally ready

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to do college-level work, and it is this assumption that drives controversy on a theoretical level” (246). Is it possible to ensure that only mature and motivated high school students participate in dual enrollment? What data will drive such assessment? High school grades and GPA indicate what students are able to

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accomplish within a system that likely provides significantly more structure than that within the college setting. High school teacher recommendations similarly assess performance within such a setting.

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is up to them. These decisions often mean the difference between academic success or failure. Schneider asked students enrolled in an Early College High School program in Toledo about their experiences taking college-level courses. One explained: “In high school, they kind of eased you into the assignment. Here, they expect you to pay attention and just get it done” (153). While college faculty treat students as adults matter-of-factly, should dual-enrolled students who are, in fact, not adults, be treated as such?

Regarding development of analytical skills, younger dual-enrolled students are at a disadvantage, generally, notes Schneider:

Writing courses often ask students to critically examine their own experience in light of broader social concerns, so very young students are potentially disadvantaged in two ways. First, young students generally do not have the miles on their tires to have accumulated much experience on which to reflect. But even when young students have a rich background on which to draw, critically examining the values, opinions, and beliefs with which they have been raised while they are still in the home and in the process of being raised is enormously difficult. (157)

Though further research is needed to determine how age affects dual-enrollment instruction, we might find “a distribution of qualitative and quantitative markers that would indicate that younger students cannot fully integrate and retain the higher-order skills they should acquire in these classes” (Schneider 159).

Critics of dual-enrollment also point to the divide between high school English course content and FYC content. Some identify the emphasis on timed

writing in high school, in preparation for a state mandated exam, as part of the problem: “[S]econdary and postsecondary teachers may serve different masters, as high school teachers usually face a mandate to prepare all their students to pass standardized multiple-choice and timed essay exams, whereas college teachers often have more freedom to take time in their classrooms to help students write several drafts or papers and explore the content of reading in some depth” (Post, Simmons, and Vanderslice 169). Test-centered teaching often leads to formulas and formats: “These days, more than ever, high school teachers tell me of the pressure to teach accessible formats for writing-on-demand. ‘Success in college’ starts with a high-enough test score. At the same time, however, most university faculty are concerned, not so much with format, as with students’ engagement with the ideas in what they read for their courses” (Farris 273).

Directly related to content is the issue of rigor. Educators would generally agree, given what we know about learning and developmental theory, that curriculum should be increasingly challenging for students. For this reason, we assume that postsecondary courses are more challenging than those courses in which students have been enrolled previously. If this is the case, the increasing demand for dual-enrollment suggests that high school instruction could be more rigorous. If high school students can handle college courses, what does that say about the challenge presented in those courses? Is recalibration in order?

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We may also ask, with Taczak and Thelin, whether the inclusion of adolescent dual-enrolled students with college students affects classroom dynamics. Schneider’s research cohort admitted being concerned about having their age revealed to the other students in the course (153–54). How do non-dual-enrolled students feel upon learning that sixteen-year-olds are learning beside them?

How does having adolescents in a college course affect instruction? One instructor in Schneider’s study explained that he was “being more deliberate when covering new material, especially argumentative strategies, and he was conferencing more,” changes that affect more than the instruction of the dual-enrolled students. Would the other students in the course feel that the new material was being “covered” too slowly? Would they view the additional conferencing as superfluous? Would they learn less as a result of such changes? Would they begin to resent their dual-enrolled classmates?

### Dual-Enrollment Programs That Work

Reviews of dual enrollment programs tend to be overwhelmingly positive, written by program participants who wish to share what they view as the benefits; drawbacks or challenges typically pale in comparison (“Dual Enrollment” 14). To indicate program success and student achievement, data emphasize increased enrollment, access, student persistence, and degree completion, including the data cited by the NACEP (see, for example, Welsh, Brake, and Choi; Karp et al., “Postsecondary”; Swanson; Adelman). One rationale offered is that since more high school students are earning college credits, these students “are capable of meeting the increased expectations that dual-credit courses demand of them,” and so educators should strive for more “learning productivity,” an acceleration of the learning process (Welsh, Brake, and Choi 210). Discussions of student learning are comparatively rare.

We perceive a disconnect between the proclaimed benefits of dual-enrollment programs and the design of the programs. Although an oft-cited benefit of these programs is that students are acclimated to the college environment

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earlier, some programs offer the college courses only on the high school campus. Others claim that students will face the rigor of college-level work but acknowledge that dual-enrollment courses are modified college courses, adapted for high school students (Koszoru 26; National High School Center 4). In other cases, college professors admit to being overly forgiving when reading and grading high school students’ work (Taczak and Thelin 9, 10, 19–20).

The more successful programs take students’ developmental needs into consideration, helping dual-enrolled students work toward college-level expectations gradually. The College Academy at Broward Community College in California, for instance, offers dual-enrolled students a blend of college-level coursework with high school support structure. Dual-enrolled students in this middle college program take all of their courses on the college campus, some (science, foreign language, and electives) with other Broward CC students and other courses (English, social science, and mathematics) with only dual-enrolled students, including high school honors classes (Koszoru 25). Jane Koszoru, an English teacher in the program, explains that one advantage of the latter is that she “can develop age- and experience-appropriate writing prompts and select literature that is engaging and connect to their lives” (26). Here high school students form a learning community.

We also need to look more closely at students' learning in these environments as a measure of each program's success. When the National High School Center examined the Early College High School (ECHS) system, site visitors observed that instruction was teacher-centered and that instructors were unsure what they should expect of EC students in college classes. They also found it easier to expect EC students to do college-level work when courses involved a mix of EC and non-EC students (4).

In the Strive Toward Excellence Program, offered at an unidentified state university in the Midwest, researchers found that dual-enrolled students did not behave in an appropriate manner in the classroom—although they behaved in a developmentally appropriate manner—and this had a negative impact on the traditional and nontraditional students in the course. Consequently, the course suffered a reduction in standards and rigor (Taczak and Thelin 9, 11). These findings beg the question, how should college instructors best educate high school students? Should they expect the same level of work? Should instructors attempt to engage high school students in new ways? An either-or approach doesn't seem ideal for dual-enrollment courses where students are crossing the divide from high school to college, so more research is needed as to program design and pedagogical practice. Additionally, oversight of such programs is needed by stakeholders with expertise in writing instruction and with the range of developmental abilities involved.

Communication and collaboration across institutions are crucial for program success and provide one venue for secondary and postsecondary educators to engage in the collegial exchanges encouraged in the CCCC "Position Statement on the Preparation and Development of Teachers of Writing." We contend that such communication and collaboration are not routinely established for every dual-enrollment program, and that the design and implementation of a dual-enrollment program have a significant influence on whether true collaboration and clear communication occur.

Chris Jennings describes a promising dual-enrollment program involving a consortium of institutions in Virginia that have forged an elaborate system of collaboration through regular communication. The focus of this program is on collaboration and communication across institutions and helping students by reducing the need for developmental college coursework while enhancing access to college for underrepresented groups (Jennings 1). The program significantly enhances writing instruction in the high school, in large part due to

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“collaborative professional workshops for English faculties, high school teacher teams to explore innovative instructional strategies to promote student accountability for progress, high school writing centers for extended dialogue and practice, and portfolios as multiple measures of authentic assessment for college placement” (2). Secondary and postsecondary faculty meet weekly to discuss curriculum and instructional concerns, with scheduling of these

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meetings being eased by the assistance of a Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant. Funds allow for substitute teachers to cover teachers’ classes so that they can participate in roundtable discussions and workshops. A deliberate attempt is made to align secondary and postsecondary curriculum: “[F]aculty from both institutions have attended workshops to refine

rubrics for assessment, establish anchor items, and participate as readers to place students in college composition courses” (4). Other positive outcomes of the collaboration include surveying students to guide instruction, initiating high school writing centers that aim to help students become more active learners who are responsible for their writing, and providing college faculty with access to students’ high school portfolios when conducting placement (6). This model provides benefits for all involved and focuses on *learning*, in this case how students are learning to write. The goal isn’t to help students do less writing, but to help them get more out of the writing they are doing. With the FIPSE grant, the major problem with college–high school collaboration is greatly diminished; we need to work toward a more comprehensive solution so that more of us can engage in such valuable discussion.

Communication between faculty across institutional levels, albeit on a smaller scale, is the main focus of the essays collected in Thomas Thompson’s *Teaching Writing in High School and College: Conversations and Collaborations*. It is interesting to note the situations that enabled these discussions: teachers and professors in the Washoe County School District, Truckee Meadows Community College, and the University of Nevada met in a three-credit graduate course developed by the Nevada Writing Alliance to clarify pedagogical goals and methods; a university professor met with teachers from Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School in Vancouver, British Columbia, during a professional conference and later at professional development days at the high school; an elementary, middle, and high school teacher met with a university professor

after having worked together as inservice staff development providers to K–12 teachers in western Massachusetts as part of that region’s Writing Project; and two collaborators, a university professor and a high school teacher, were able to schedule discussions about writing instruction because they were married and living together (Lafer et al. 97; Strachan 136–37; Callahan et al. 203; Brantley and Brantley 214). Clearly, cross-grade-level collaboration requires some measure of creativity and commitment to allow for scheduling and funding, particularly given our current economic climate (Addison and McGee 148).

Another feature present in successful dual-enrollment programs is some level of intervention into students’ educational experience. Such intervention is important given the varied developmental levels of students. One recent study of students participating in a dual-enrollment program revealed “that the cognitive capabilities of some dual enrollment students have not developed enough to handle effectively the challenges of the contemporary conception of composition” (Taczak and Thelin 7). Other programs, such as the College Academy at Broward Community College, show that it is beneficial for some regular, mandatory “checking in” with a counselor, adviser, professor, or student group to take place. To allow time for regular checking in, dual-enrolled students at Broward don’t have as rigidly scheduled a day as does the traditional high school student, but one more structured than that of a college student. An English instructor in the program explains:

Because students typically take two three-credit classes in the mornings, they have at least twelve hours of unscheduled time during the week. . . . [T]hey may use some of this time to complete group activities and utilize the resources available at the college library and the student resource center. . . . Second, each of my English classes meets for five hours per week instead of the three hours of a typical three-credit college course. I use the extra two hours of class time to incorporate the skills that would normally be included in traditional junior and senior English classes. (Koszoru 26)

During students’ two years in the College Academy, they earn twelve to eighteen English credits in composition and literature; this program restructures the educational experience to offer students additional instruction in certain academic areas (Koszoru 26). The design of the program allows students to experience the environment of a college classroom, including its academic and social demands, while also being connected with adults who offer individualized guidance and instruction when needed. This guidance even helps them act appropriately as college students in their morning classes: “[W]e urge them



not to crowd together outside of classrooms and not to engage in horseplay on the front lawns; we tell them to keep their voices low and to treat all adults with courtesy and respect” (29).

Similar intervention occurs within a dual-enrollment program at the Early College High School model developed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

**These models and others like them indicate that the best dual-enrollment programs assess student learning—both for dual-enrolled students and those sitting alongside them. They provide the necessary scaffolding to help dual-enrolled students meet college professors’ expectations, offering academic rigor with the necessary support and intervention in place. Equally important, they carve out space for faculty in all institutions involved to discuss pedagogical methods and the goals of the program.**

Here the goal is to encourage more students, particularly underrepresented students, to participate in and successfully complete the college-preparatory course sequence in high school, increasing the likelihood that they’ll be successful in college (Edmunds et al. 348). In North Carolina, these schools are located on college campuses and offer students college credits. One key feature of this program is a “personalized environment,” whereby students are offered individualized support, assisted logistically (and intentionally) by the small size of these schools (359, 363).

These models and others like them indicate that the best dual-enrollment programs assess student learning—both for dual-enrolled students and those sitting alongside them. They provide the necessary scaffolding to help dual-enrolled students meet college professors’ expectations, offering academic rigor with the necessary support and intervention in place. Equally important, they carve out space for faculty in all institutions involved to discuss pedagogical methods and the goals of the program.

### **A Call for Engagement**

From its inception, NCTE’s relationship with colleges has been complex and, at times, problematic. One need not return to 1911 to find evidence of tension between the organization and postsecondary institutions. Consider the negative response received to its jointly published (with the International Reading Association) “Standards for the English Language Arts,” a thoughtful and energetic attempt in the 1990s to engage with the nationwide dialogue on assessment occurring at the time. John Mayer, a key player in the development of the document, notes the resistance from the college leadership within NCTE at the time:

Most simply put, the biggest split that we saw was between college English teachers (with some high school allies) and K–12 teachers with allies in teacher education.

Like all such generalizations, this one has plenty of exceptions on all sides, but institutionally, one set of the most influential negative responses to our approach came from leaders of the college section of the NCTE, including their representatives on the executive committee, and leaders of the MLA who were consulted throughout the process. . . . Part of that derived from the fact that our approach was not literature centered. Most college English departments, after all, teach literature to the exclusion of all else, consigning even composition instruction to second-class citizenship. . . . [W]e had neither a general (e.g., British and American literature) or a specific literary canon (a list of required texts) at the heart of our conception. (Mayer 114–15).

Interestingly, the very element that one might think would bring English instructors from college and high school together—the teaching of the literary canon—became the bone of contention between them, with the college leadership expecting explicit standards on what should be read as part of the language arts curriculum, K–12. The document and the intense response attest to the complex relationship between the College Section and the K through 12 entities within the organization.

Dual enrollment further complicates that relationship. If, as Kathleen Yancey claims, and as dual-enrollment programs (not to mention online delivery of college courses) seem to confirm, “college . . . is no longer a specific place,” then a conversation about assessment, for example, becomes even more shifting and problematic and, doubtless, more charged (Yancey 4). After all, a principal may “pull the plug” on material deemed inappropriate for high school students in a college-level course, and colleges may chafe at the prospect of having collegiate courses taught by high school teachers or question the rigor of a curriculum “transplanted” in a high school environment (Bodmer).

While we are under no illusions as to the difficulty of bringing high school and college faculty together to talk about teaching and curriculum standards, we nonetheless urge NCTE to engage with the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), interested private organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and its own section leadership in a serious dialogue on dual-enrollment programs. Specifically, NCTE can assist NACEP in bringing coherence and disciplinary expertise to dual-enrollment nationwide—in contrast with the “catch as catch can” or “each state go it alone” approach that currently characterizes dual-enrollment nationally.

Dual-enrollment programs are not going away. Too many forces, economic and political, are at work to prevent that from happening. At the very least, NCTE would do well to draft a position statement on dual-enrollment programs affecting the teaching of writing and literature that (a) constructively recognizes

the increasing popularity of such programs and (b) offers expert standards by which those programs ought to be evaluated. Dual enrollment has been around for decades and continues to grow. It's time for NCTE to get in the game.

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## Howard Tinberg

Howard Tinberg, professor of English at Bristol Community College in Fall River, Massachusetts, is the author of three books: *Border Talk: Writing and Knowing at the Two-Year College* (NCTE, 1997); *Writing with Consequence: What Writing Does*

*in the Disciplines* (Longman, 2003); and (with Jean-Paul Nadeau) *Community College Writers: Exceeding Expectations* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2010). He is coeditor, with Patrick Sullivan, of *What Is "College-Level" Writing?* (NCTE, 2006) and, with Patrick Sullivan and Sheridan Blau, of *What Is "College-Level" Writing? volume 2: Assignments, Readings, and Student Writing Samples* (NCTE, 2010). He is past editor of the NCTE journal *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. He has published articles in a range of journals, including *College English*, *College Composition and Communication*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, *Pedagogy*, *ADE Bulletin*, *English Journal*, *Change*, *Journal of Basic Writing*, and *Community College Review*. He is the 2004 recipient of the Carnegie/CASE Community College Professor of the Year and served as a Carnegie Scholar in 2005–06.

### **Jean-Paul Nadeau**

Jean-Paul Nadeau is associate professor of English at Bristol Community College in Fall River, Massachusetts, and chair of its English Department Portfolio Assessment Project. He is the coauthor of two books, the first, with Howard Tinberg, *Community College Writers: Exceeding Expectations* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2010) and the second, with Laurie Hazard, a first-year experience textbook that will soon be in its third edition, *Foundations for Learning: Claiming Your Education* (Prentice Hall, 2011). He has published articles in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *Writing Center Journal*.

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