Finishing College Faster: Accelerated Mechanisms

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Abstract
Florida has several ways in which students can get a head start in college. A state-wide dual enrollment program is one way that may be replicable in Latin America and the Caribbean. This paper describes how the program allows high school students to take free college courses that count toward both high school and college graduation. It also addresses how students who take the Advanced Level Programs through the College Board, Puerto Rico and Latin America Office, can earn college credit while in high school.

Keywords
Dual enrollment, international students, advanced placement, tuition, accelerated mechanisms

Introduction
The events of September 11, 2001, did nothing to diminish the desire of international students to study in the U.S. On top of the increased documentation necessary to obtain an F-1 visa, however, is the expense international students face to obtain education in the U.S. The tuition for private colleges and universities continues to soar. Add room and board and occasional travel back home, and the costs become prohibitive except for the very well-to-do. But private institutions are not alone. Out-of-state tuition in public institutions is now close to four times that of in-state students, and room and board and the cost of travel home do not decrease. Students and their families can cut those costs, however, making the experience more affordable and enabling students to realize their aspirations. Early planning and successful completion of those plans can shorten the stay in the U.S. by as much as a year. Obviously, students who complete two years of study in their own country before transferring to a U.S. institution, who adhere to the curriculum of the university they plan to enter, will have only two or so years remaining to complete a degree. I am talking here primarily about those who wish to enter as freshmen, though others can apply some of the same strategies.

**Dual Enrollment**

Dual enrollment may be replicable in other places, especially in those places in which the public community colleges or universities are funded by the same source that funds secondary schools. Dual Enrollment is, at least in the state of Florida, “the enrollment of an eligible secondary student or home education student in a postsecondary course creditable toward a career and technical certificate or an associate or baccalaureate degree” (Section 1007.271, Florida Statutes). Florida lets students who meet certain criteria, based on cumulative grade point average and test scores, take college courses that the high school accepts for graduation, and the fees are waived by the postsecondary institution. In fact, for public school students even the instructional materials are free. By the time a student graduates from high school, he could earn many credits toward his college degree. Naturally, a program such as this takes cooperation among the entities involved. Since public education is funded by the state, and the state was trying to find accelerated mechanisms, partly because of overcrowding at all levels and the associated quest to push some of the
bodies through, it saw fit to count that body at both levels as a fundable unit. As it turned out, it has become a program good for all: the good student gets a head start, the highs schools can provide others with smaller classes and closer instruction, and the community colleges and universities can use it as a recruiting tool to attract the brightest students. An international student who earned such credit at an accredited institution while in high school could possibly save more than a year in college costs.

**Advanced Placement**

Advanced Placement (AP) is “the enrollment of an eligible secondary student in a course offered through the Advanced Placement Program administered by the College Board” (Section 1007.27(6), Florida Statutes). Students enroll in courses in their high school and at the completion of the course take the AP exam in that subject area. A score of three, four, or five earns college credit in most U.S. institutions. Additionally, The College Board, Puerto Rico and Latin America Office, has an Advanced Level Program that works similarly. Students enroll in courses at the end of which they sit for an exam. The subjects include Spanish, English, Math Level I, Math Level II, Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities. Many schools are not aware of these exams, but at Florida International University, we accept those scores for credit, but for some the lowest score we take is a four. Again, a course at a home institution that earns college credit can save money and time at the U.S. institution.

**The College-Level Examination Program**

The College Board also offers the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP). CLEP can be used to obtain college credit in a subject area that the student has a mastery of. The credit is accepted at more than 2,900 universities and colleges, and many administer the exam themselves, which means that a student can take it even upon arrival in the U.S., a good asset for transfer students. Many of these exams, covering more than 30 areas, can even be used to satisfy requirements in the major or pre-requisites, not just for general education requirements. The College Board, Puerto Rico and Latin America Office, can also help with these exams, and many of them can be administered by the U.S. Embassy.
International Baccalaureate Program

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Office is based in Switzerland, but one of its four regional offices is in Buenos Aires. The IB program has three components, primary years, middle years, and diploma. A student completing the diploma program and passing exams can earn up to 30 credits toward college. It is a rigorous program for motivated students, but if the end meets the aims, the student is equipped to succeed not only in college, but also in the world community.

Advanced International Certificate of Education

This is another program by which students can earn up to 30 semester hours of credit by passing exams. It is administered by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. Courses are offered in three curriculum areas: Mathematics and Science, Languages, Arts and Humanities. Within this framework, studies have the opportunity to pair their interests with the course work.

Conclusion

Many of these programs can be adapted to local situations, and most of the agencies will be happy to collaborate to ensure the success of the programs. I have not mentioned DANTES/DSST, a set of exams that used to be limited to military personnel, nor Excelsior College exams, nor credit by exam at the departmental level because they are not universally accepted or not as widely available. That does not mean that a student seeking an alternate, less expensive means to obtain college credit should omit them in his search for alternatives. Any of these might be viable. Most institutions list in their catalogs the alternatives that they will accept, and those should be investigated before investing in any of the alternatives. In times of rising tuition, of airfare, of housing, the student who can take advantage of the opportunities and earn college credit before attending a foreign institution is saving money and advancing in the system—a good situation for all concerned, especially the parents who are paying.

Resources and Contacts

Advanced Placement
http://www.collegeboard.com/splash
Advanced Placement International
http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/article/0,3045,150-157-0-2155,00.html

AICE
http://www.cie.org.uk/CIE/WebSite/qualificationsandawardshub/ciespecialisms/aice/aice.jsp

CLEP
http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/about.html

College Board, Puerto Rico and Latin America Office
http://oprla.collegeboard.com/

Dual Enrollment (Florida)
http://www.fiu.edu/%7Eunderstu/destatute.html

IB
http://www.ibo.org/