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**EQUITY ISSUES IN DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS:
EXPLORING AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF DUAL ENROLLMENT**

by

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Requirements of the Degree of

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ABSTRACT
**EQUITY ISSUES IN DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS:
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PERCEPTIONS OF DUAL ENROLLMENT**

Kristen W. Rarig
Old Dominion University, 2019
Director: Dr. Chris R. Glass

Dual enrollment has been shown to increase post-secondary student success outcomes across a variety of measures such as retention, grade point average, and four-year attainment (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; Hoffman, 2012, Pretlow & Wathington, 2014). In Virginia, access to community colleges among students of color has increased from 32.3% in 2008 to 42.7% in 2018 (SCHEV, 2019-a). Despite these gains, far fewer African American students than White students participate in dual enrollment in Virginia, which has significant implications for their future success in post-secondary education. This study examined the experiences that influenced African American students’ choice to participate in dual enrollment, and the implications of these experiences. Using a phenomenological approach, this study sought to gain insight and understanding of the lived experiences of African American dual enrollment students.

The findings from this study described African American high school students’ perceptions as they moved from awareness of dual enrollment to interest in dual enrollment to acting on a choice to dual enroll. The students’ experiences highlighted a lack of awareness and a belief that dual enrollment is more for White students. Despite this, the students identified the positive factors in participating, such as improving their GPA, getting a head start on college, and saving money. The students who were undecided about their post-secondary plans prior to participating in dual enrollment credit that experience with their decision to enroll in college.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mother who, sadly, did not get to see it completed.

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Many people, at one time or another—and usually at exactly the right time—played a part in the completion of this dissertation. The individual who started it all, Dr. Tiffany Ray, encouraged and badgered me into trying ‘just one class.’ Throughout the process she pushed and prodded, encouraged and listened. Without her, this never would have happened.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Dual enrollment, broadly defined, is a program in which high school students enroll in college-level courses and receive both high school and college credit. Dual enrollment programs have expanded significantly since California adopted them in the mid-seventies (California Education Code, 1976). This early experiment was an effort to provide a smooth transition from high school to college for qualified high school students participating in either academic or vocational courses at community colleges. By the 2010-2011 academic year, 1.4 million students were participating in dual enrollment programs (Department of Education (DOE), 2016). Despite this burgeoning access, dual enrollment opportunities are not being adopted equitably across student populations.

In the *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSL:09) 2013 Update and High School Transcript Study: A First Look at Fall 2009 Ninth-Graders in 2013*, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that African American students are less likely to finish college-level coursework in high school (Dalton, Ingels, & Fritch, 2018). Specifically, only five percent of African American students earned dual enrollment credits while in high school, compared to 12% of white students (Dalton, Ingels, & Fritch, 2018). Some of this disparity may be accounted for because many dual enrollment programs require students and parents to pay tuition for dual enrollment courses, which prevents students from low socioeconomic backgrounds from taking advantage of dual enrollment options (Loschert, 2015). But this disparity is also seen in Virginia where, despite the Virginia Community College System's mission of access for all students and policy guidance to provide dual enrollment at no cost to students, far fewer African American students than White students participate in dual enrollment

(State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV, 2019-b). In the 2018-2019 academic year, 37,841 high school students participated in dual enrollment with the Virginia Community College System and only 4,389 of them, less than 11.6%, were African American (SCHEV, 2019-b). Virginia’s efforts to provide equal access in dual enrollment programs are not producing fair results, and African American students are not represented equitably in dual enrollment programs in the state.

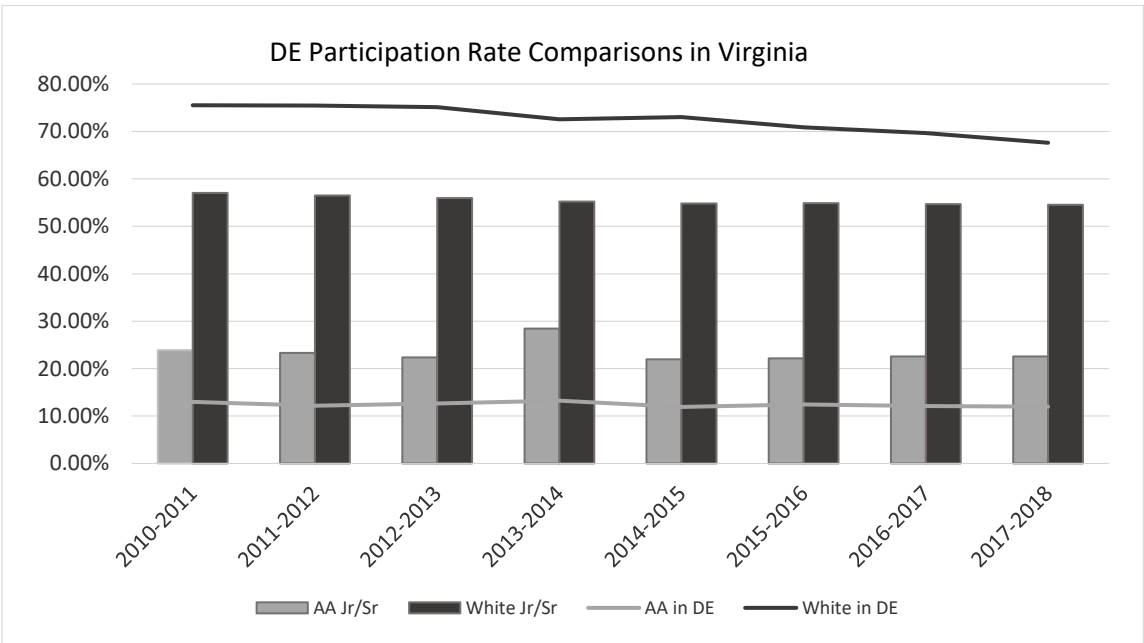


Figure 1. Dual enrollment participation compared to representation in the eligible population in Virginia.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences that influenced African American students’ choice to participate in dual enrollment programs at a large, suburban community college. Despite the growth and popularity of dual enrollment, and the research that indicates it contributes to positive student outcomes for students across race and socioeconomic

status, the low participation rate among African American students means these benefits are not being afforded to this population of students (An, 2013).

African American high school juniors and seniors in Virginia are not dual enrolling at rates that would advance their participation in higher education and the economic benefits that accompany higher degree attainment (SCHEV, 2019-b). From the 2013-2014 academic year to the 2018-2019 academic year, the number of African American high school juniors and seniors (the grades eligible for dual enrollment) decreased from 28.4% to 22.6% of the total junior and senior population in Virginia (Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), 2018). During that same period, White juniors and seniors decreased only slightly, from 55.2% to 54.5%, both groups reflecting the overall decline in high school students in Virginia (VDOE, 2018). When comparing the number of students who were dual enrolled over the same time span, African American students' dual enrollment participation rates decreased from 13.2% to 11.6%. White students' participation rates also decreased from 72.6% in 2013-2014 to 65.7% in 2018-2019, but they participated at higher rates than their overall representation in the population. African American students participated at slightly more than half their representation in the population. White students, conversely, were participating at rates consistently above their representation in the population. The participation for both groups has fallen, with White students participating at 2.1% above their representation in 2018-2019, from a high of 31.5% in 2013-2014 (VDOE, 2018).

Table 1.

African American (AA) and White Dual Enrollment (DE) Participation Rates in Virginia

School Year	AA Jr/Sr Pop	AA in DE	White Pop	White in DE
2013-2014	28.45%	13.23%	55.22%	72.59%
2014-2015	21.96%	11.91%	54.81%	73.01%
2015-2016	22.17%	12.45%	54.90%	70.86%
2016-2017	22.58%	12.12%	54.65%	69.63%
2017-2018	22.59%	11.94%	54.54%	67.61%
2018-2019	22.59%	11.60%	54.54%	65.71%

The success of students who participate in dual enrollment programs has implications for community colleges in terms of reducing remedial education (An, 2015), increasing retention, raising GPAs (Allen & Dadgar, 2012), improving completion (Hofmann, 2012), and increasing access for students (An, 2011; Pretlow & Wathington, 2014). Although more students than ever are participating nationally, research indicates White and more affluent students are more likely to participate in dual enrollment programs, thus reaping the benefits, than their racial minority and less affluent classmates (Museus, Lutovsky, & Colbeck, 2007). The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences that influenced African American students' choice to participate in dual enrollment programs at a large, suburban community college in Virginia.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the background of the problem, with a discussion of the research on dual enrollment programs to provide context and background to the study. This is followed by the problem statement, purpose of the study, and the significance of the

study. From there, the chapter introduces the research design, assumptions, limitations and methodology. Finally, a brief definition of terms and a chapter summary are provided.

Background of the Problem

Concern about student success outcomes is not a recent phenomenon. *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983 and, despite decades of education reform, achievement gaps still persist (Hill, Guin & Celio, 2003).

The preamble to *A Nation at Risk* (1983) states:

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself (Gardner, 1983, n.p.).

This admittedly aged and deliberately selected quotation underscores the intransigence and unfortunate longevity of this issue. These words were part of the National Commission on Excellence in Education published in 1983. Despite this report and more recent research (Bohmstead, Kitmitto, Ogut, Sherman, & Chan, 2015; Bowman, Comer & Johns, 2018; Tsoi-A & Bryant, 2015), African American students are not receiving the fair chance nor the necessary tools to develop to which the commission felt they were entitled (Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008). The achievement gap between White students and African American students continues to be one of the most critical, complex and intractable issues in education today (Greene et al., 2008; Rovai, Gallien, & Wighting, 2005). Many contributors to the achievement gap can be identified, including lower educational attainment of parents, lack of access to quality schools for

students, weak study habits, destructive peer influences, low academic expectations of African American students, and poor racial climates on campus (An, 2011; Rovai et al., 2005).

Over the last half-century, there have been dramatic changes in public policy, cultural norms, and demographics in higher education (Goldrick-Rab & Cook, 2013). As participation in higher education has increased, the academic preparation of students has declined (Goldrick-Rab & Cook, 2013). While students from the bottom socioeconomic quartile have significantly increased their presence in higher education, 63% of them will need remediation (Goldrick-Rab & Cook, 2013). Further, diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic class continue to present significant implications for American higher education (Smith, 2011). According to Smith (2011), “higher education’s role in building a thriving pluralistic and equitable society is now being established” (p. 487).

Dual enrollment can play an important role in addressing issues of academic preparation and readiness for college. Policymakers consider dual enrollment a way to align secondary and postsecondary education systems (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; Hoffman, Vargas & Santos, 2009). Although dual enrollment can be a tool for increasing college readiness and expanding access to postsecondary education, there is also the potential to exacerbate the inequities already existing in postsecondary opportunity (Museus, Lutovsky, & Colbeck, 2007). In order to advance educational equity for all students, dual enrollment must be available and seen as viable for racial minority and less affluent students.

As open access institutions, community colleges are increasingly serving diverse populations (Garibaldi, 2014; Renn & Reason, 2013), which are disproportionately female and African American or Latino (Goldrick-Rab & Cook, 2013). Garibaldi (2014) found these populations had lower retention and graduation rates in comparison to White high school

students, and they had lower levels of college enrollment and completion. This lack of completion from these populations exacerbates the gender disparity at upper levels of education as well, impacting male, African American, and Latino enrollment in graduate and professional programs (Garibaldi, 2014).

In 2012-2013, 11.8% of White high school seniors participated in dual enrollment nationwide; however, only 5.3% of African American students did the same (NCES, 2013a). The lack of racial minority student participation in dual enrollment is troubling, given the research showing dual enrolled racial minority students were 26% more likely to enroll in college (either community college or four-year institutions) and 14% more likely to complete than their non-dual enrolled peers (Taylor, 2015). Although impressive, these outcomes present a challenge for policymakers because the positive effect for racial minority students is smaller than the average effect, suggesting state dual enrollment policies do not benefit all students equally (Taylor, 2015). Taylor and colleagues argue the “credit-only” model discounts the non-cognitive and psychosocial skills that indicate college readiness, which might be especially important for racial minority students whose experiences prior to college may not provide the abilities needed to be successful in college. Programs designed to develop and support these factors, such as Early College High Schools (ECHS), provide comprehensive resources for academic and social behaviors. This unequal rate of participation has led to proponents of dual enrollment pushing an “equity agenda” (An, 2013, p. 412) to reach a more diverse group of students. The opposing view posits allowing all students to participate reduces the quality and rigor of the content (An, 2013).

Given the potential for dual enrollment to positively impact African American students’ post-secondary success, a deeper understanding of their experiences is necessary in order to

develop strategies to address the equity gap. This research study addresses a gap in the literature about how African American community college students' experiences influence their choice to participate in dual enrollment and how they perceive their dual enrollment experience.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growth and expansion of dual enrollment programs throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia, African American students are considerably underrepresented (SCHEV, 2019-b). There is robust research indicating dual enrollment leads to positive outcomes for students, including higher GPA and greater retention than students without dual enrollment experiences (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; Hoffman, 2012; Pretlow & Wathington, 2014), and yet minorities are less likely to participate and achieve those outcomes (An, 2011; Museus et al., 2007). There is scant research on African American students' perceptions of dual enrollment, which may affect their willingness to participate. Despite being widely available, opportunities for improved student success outcomes through participation in dual enrollment are not being felt equitably across the Commonwealth. In order to examine how African American community college students perceive dual enrollment, qualitative research on their experience of dual enrollment is essential to develop strategies to increase their participation and, ultimately, their chances for success.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand and describe the experiences that influenced African American community college students to participate in dual enrollment while in high school and subsequently enroll at a large, suburban community college in Virginia. The impetus for the study was the researcher's interest in exploring ways to increase overall access to dual enrollment for African American community college students. There is a

wealth of research on the overall success benefits of dual enrollment programs, but very little literature on the actual experiences of these underrepresented groups and the elements that influence their decisions to participate (An, 2013). With the heightened focus on education outcomes, performance-based funding models, and legislative interest in dual enrollment, empirical research is necessary to guide and inform policy for dual enrollment programs. With all the available research demonstrating dual enrollment participation is a viable means of reducing socioeconomic gaps in student educational attainment (An, 2013; Ganzert, 2012), more needs to be learned about how expanding the opportunity for dual enrollment to students can increase college-going rates, success in college, and college completion. Any program that supports and eases students' transitions into these programs has significant workforce and economic benefits and must be thoroughly studied and understood to realize the broadest possible participation. Administrators, practitioners, legislators, and stakeholders all have a vested interest in ensuring the benefits of dual enrollment programs are available and accessible equitably to these populations.

Although community colleges are open access and eligible students may receive federal financial aid, this is not the case with dual enrollment students because they are not yet high school graduates. Most dual enrollment programs have some admission criteria, and many have cost requirements. Cost and academic admission criteria disproportionately impact African American students (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). Dual enrollment programs continue to grow and expand nationally, and policymakers increasingly see their value in terms of positive student success outcomes. Dual enrollment is a program that can advance educational equity and have a significant impact on not only students' futures, but that of the nation. The challenge for administrators, academics, and policymakers is finding ways to increase participation among

African American students without lowering academic standards. By investigating how students perceive their dual enrollment experience and what influences may have led to their election to participate, practical considerations may arise to assist in expanding the scope of the dual enrollment opportunity. There has been very little exploration into experiences of African American high school students in Virginia and what may have influenced them to participate in dual enrollment and reap its benefits. This study will provide insight into the dual enrollment experience of African American students who have completed dual enrollment courses successfully in high school and have subsequently matriculated to community college.

Significance of the Study

The Virginia Community College System (VCCS), celebrating 50 years of service to the Commonwealth in 2018, is comprised of 23 institutions providing high-quality workforce training and transfer programs to citizens in order to produce an educated populace and a skilled workforce (VCCS, 2019a). Because the colleges are open access, students enter with a variety of barriers, including academic, social, and economic, to their success. Students who arrive on community college campuses with dual enrollment experience have better outcomes than their peers who do not (Ganzert, 2012). Increasing opportunities for dual enrollment in high school, therefore, has the potential to lead to increased success among incoming community college students, minorities included. To this end, examining the experiences of racial minority students is critical to ensuring they are able to participate equitably with their White peers.

There are numerous studies that demonstrate benefits of dual enrollment to students, including greater likelihood of enrolling in post-secondary education and higher levels of associate's or bachelor's degree attainment than non-dual enrolled students (Struhl & Vargas, 2012). Dual enrollment is significantly associated with postsecondary access, retention and

completion, and the significance was greater than that seen in Advanced Placement credit attainment (Giani, Alexander & Reyes, 2014). Further, both African American and White dual enrollment students had similar college GPAs, with African American dual enrollment students outperforming non-dual enrolled African American students (Young, Slate, Moore & Barnes, 2013). As a mechanism to increase post-secondary success, the research is robust and clear: dual enrollment benefits high school students and those benefits are felt across racial and economic status.

Findings and results from this study may be significant to a variety of stakeholders, including high school counselors, parents, education administrators and practitioners, and state policy makers. Superintendents set policy and create cultures around student success goals. High school counselors play an important role in student course selection and provide information about post-secondary options. Parents, particularly those who have not attended college themselves, may not be aware of the possibility for their children to participate in dual enrollment, earn college credit in high school, and attain benefits that will aid them in their future educational endeavors. Community college administrators are increasingly concerned with student outcomes, especially in Virginia, where funding is tied to performance. Widening the pipeline from high school dual enrollment to matriculating to college could be beneficial from a funding perspective. State policymakers in Virginia are increasingly interested in dual enrollment and show willingness to legislate access to it, as well as its quality. The more knowledge and understanding they have of how dual enrollment participation impacts students, the more impactful their legislation will be.

This research will enhance the knowledge base about African American community college students' experiences in dual enrollment by exploring their choices, perceptions, beliefs,

and motivations about how their dual enrollment experience impacted their college readiness and subsequent college outcome. Despite gains in racial diversity in college populations, proportionate gains for students of color have not occurred (Bergerson, 2009). Dual enrollment programs have the potential to increase postsecondary opportunities, but they also have the potential to further intensify existing inequities in college access (Museus et al., 2007). In the study of college choice processes for students of color, the research shows a need to pay attention to individual student needs, rather than to attempt an amassed understanding of college choice (Bergerson, 2009). This is the essence of equity: that students get what they need to be successful, not that they are all treated the same. The knowledge gained from the study addresses a gap in the current literature and will be important to both high schools and community colleges by adding insight into the perceptions and beliefs of racial minority students toward higher education in general, and dual enrollment participation in particular. Dual enrollment is a powerful experience; it is important that it be widely enjoyed by all students in Virginia.

Research Design

The research method for this study was qualitative. Qualitative research attempts to show the multifaceted layers and dimensions of a particular issue under study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Qualitative approaches focus on phenomena that occur in natural settings and involve capturing and studying the complexity of those phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Qualitative research is appropriate because it seeks to hear the stories and voices of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013) and because it seeks to assess participants' intentionality, or their internal experience of being conscious of something (Hays & Singh, 2012). Using interview data collected from the transcriptions of interviews with African American community college students who participated in dual enrollment, their stories and experiences will emerge.

The research design for this qualitative study was phenomenological. By understanding the life-world of a participant, this method of research searches for commonalities across participants to see how their lived experiences relate to a phenomenon, in this case dual enrollment participation (Hays & Singh, 2012). Creswell (2013) stated the basic purpose of phenomenological research is to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 76). A phenomenological approach is appropriate because the viewpoints and personal experiences of the African American students who participated in dual enrollment will be examined to understand what factors have influenced them in their choice to participate in dual enrollment and their subsequent collegiate experience. These students’ perceptions about participation in dual enrollment courses at both high school and on the college campus will be explored to develop a description of the student experience.

The study used a stratified purposeful sample of African American community college students who had participated in dual enrollment at a local high school prior to attending community college. Stratified purposeful samples seek unique features of subgroups on a phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012), in this case, African American students as the subgroup of the larger group of high school dual enrollment students who had matriculated to VA Community College. The sample sought out four semesters’-worth of students, via a student information system query, in order to create a representative sample.

Creswell (2013) identified four basic forms of qualitative data. The goal of the study was to understand experiences and perceptions; therefore, interview data was selected as the most appropriate form. Brinkman and Kvale (2015) discussed the nature of the research interview as a professional conversation based on the daily-life conversations between the researcher and the

interviewee. It is illustrative that they break the word into two parts, further exemplifying the *inter-view* and *inter-change* of ideas about a topic of mutual interest (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015).

The students were contacted via official college email addresses and offered the opportunity to participate (Appendix C). Students who responded affirmatively received a follow-up email (Appendix D) detailing the nature of the interviews. Of the sample of 69 students, 11 were ultimately interviewed. Saturation, when no additional themes or ideas emerge, was attained. The interviews were semi-structured to allow maximum latitude to explore emerging themes and concepts from the interview subjects. The students were interviewed over a course of weeks in the spring semester 2019.

Research Foci

The central question explores what influences African American community college students' decision to participate in dual enrollment while in high school and how the experience influenced subsequent college-going choices.

- 1) What influences African American high school students to decide to participate in a dual enrollment program in high school?
- 2) How does their experience in dual enrollment programs influence their college-going decision-making?

Definition of Terms

Dual enrollment is a broad term that can be used to describe different types of arrangements for high school students to obtain college credit while in high school. It can be called dual credit, co-enrollment, early college, or the term used by NACEP, concurrent enrollment. There are important distinctions in how these arrangements are set up. A high school student taking a college class on a college campus with traditional college students and receiving

high school credit at the same time is technically dual credit, but that is not the model used in this study. Early College models can be found nationally with selective admission criteria, taught on college campuses by college faculty but comprised only of high school students. For this study, the participants were enrolled in a dual enrollment program that aligns with the NACEP standard: a high school student enrolled in a college-level course in their high school taught by a credentialed high school teacher. In Virginia, a contractual partnership exists between a school, public or private, that outlines expectations and responsibilities for both high school students and credentialed high school teachers. Students earn both high school credit and college credit for the same course. The contractual partnership allows for 100% of tuition to be reimbursed to the high schools, resulting in no tuition, fee, or book costs to students. Although the term ‘concurrent enrollment’ would be more accurate and match the national standard, Virginia continues to use ‘dual enrollment’ in its practice and policy.

Assumptions

Assumptions are conditions that are taken for granted; otherwise the research would be useless (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). In this study, the sample population must all have participated in dual enrollment in order to reflect on their experience. The researcher must also be able to elicit honest feedback from the students using methods outlined by Brinkman and Kvale (2015), who describe research interviews as an “inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 4).

Limitations

Limitations are shortcomings, influences, and/or conditions that may place restrictions on the study and cannot be controlled by the researcher. The study is limited by the response rate and the demographics of the students who respond. If the sample contains more females, for

example, then the responses will contain more female perspectives. The honesty and openness of the interviewees is another limitation. They will be asked questions intended to explore personal decisions and experiences, and their willingness to be open, honest, and reflective could limit the nature of the responses. Finally, the age, race, and position of the researcher may impact student responses. The researcher is a white female in her mid-50s who holds a leadership position at the community college. Attempts were made to secure younger African American student workers to conduct the interviews to lessen this power impact; however, the students' schedules generally prohibited them from being able to assist with the interviews and this effort had to be abandoned.

Another possible limitation centers around the enthusiasm the students showed about participation. This surprised the researcher, whose previous research on a similar topic at the same community college resulted in a very poor response rate. The responses to this request for research participants yielded email responses such as "I would love to be a part of this," "I'm interested!" and "I would be happy to participate." This could indicate that those students whose stories include a bad experience that might shed more light on why African American students don't participate in dual enrollment as frequently as Whites were not heard. Despite its limitations, this study provided a unique opportunity to study the effects dual enrollment participation had on the students' decision making.

Delimitations

Delimitations are choices in design made by the researcher that act as boundaries for the study. Delimitations include all of the decisions made in the creation of the study, including the selection of a qualitative design, the use of interviews for data collection, the selection of the community college, the criteria for the sample, etc. Although this study explores the students'

perceptions of their dual enrollment experience and the experiences leading up to it, it will not expand to the entirety of their secondary education experience.

Only students from high schools in one community college service region were included in the sample. The timing of the study was one academic semester. At any given time, a variety of program re-designs are happening on a college campus, from developmental mathematics to the introduction of guided pathways. The effects of these impacts on the students' experiences were not included or addressed.

Summary

Dual enrollment programs offer students an opportunity to experience college-level work while still in high school. The growth and popularity of the program has led to higher levels of student success outcomes for students who participate compared to those who do not. However, when one population of students is participating at rates lower than their overall representation in the population while another group is participating at greater rates than their representation, an inequity exists that must be explored. Once this inequity is explored, the goal of this research is to describe and offer recommendations.

The remainder of the study is organized into four additional chapters, a reference list, and appendices. Chapter Two begins with the literature review of the study to provide its conceptual framework, organized into specific areas relevant to dual enrollment programs beginning with a brief history of dual enrollment, policy issues, and student/faculty perspectives. Different delivery modes of dual enrollment are explored. Chapter Three describes the methods and procedures used to design and implement this study and explains the researcher's methodological choices. It presents an overview of qualitative research, its connection to the methodology, the methodological approach, research setting, and participants. Chapter Four presents an analysis of

the data and discusses the findings. Chapter Five provides the summary, conclusions, implications, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dual enrollment programs have emerged as programs capable of providing positive success outcomes for students across a range of metrics including GPA (Allen & Dadgar, 2012), improving completion (Hoffman, 2012), and increasing access for students (An, 2011; Pretlow & Wathington, 2014). However, far fewer racial minority students participate than do White students. The majority of dual enrollment programs are offered in partnership with community colleges, which also serve as open access institutions with a mission to educate the local workforce and provide open access to the students in the region (Shannon & Smith, 2006). Although enrollment in community colleges shows large participation by African American and students of color, this pattern does not hold for dual enrollment rates (SCHEV, 2019-a). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American community college students who participated in dual enrollment prior to matriculating to a large, urban community college in Virginia. This chapter provides the conceptual framework and synthesizes the existing literature on dual enrollment and racial minority dual enrollment participation in higher education at community colleges.

The literature review organizes research into specific concepts relevant to dual enrollment programs, beginning with a brief history of the growth and development of dual enrollment models nationally and in the Commonwealth of Virginia specifically. Policy issues and student and faculty perspectives are discussed. As dual enrollment programs have expanded nationally, there is much disparity in modes of delivery and definitions of terminology (Pretlow & Wathington, 2014). These delivery modes are examined and a definition of dual enrollment given. The literature review also explores the impacts of dual enrollment on student success

outcomes such as increased college readiness, higher GPA, higher levels of retention and completion, and improved levels of motivation and achievement. Moving to the concerns of access and equity, a survey of literature on the impacts of dual enrollment for racial minority and low-income students reviews statistics on participation. Finally, a qualitative analysis of several students on the student experience in dual enrollment programs provides a description of dual enrollment from their perspective.

Conceptual Framework

Creswell (2013) defined philosophy as the “use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research” (p. 16). It is important to understand the philosophical assumptions underlying qualitative research in order to be able to articulate them in research (Creswell, 2013). This research uses an ontological philosophical assumption by encouraging the idea of multiple realities with the intent of reporting on them (Creswell, 2013). The study uses a constructivist perspective. In social constructivism, the ontological assumption is that our lived experiences and interactions construct multiple realities (Creswell, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (2013) posed the ontological question as “what is the nature of reality” (p. 37)? The epistemological assumption constructs a reality between the researcher and the research participants shaped by their individual experiences (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, the question amounts to “what is the nature of the knower and the knowable” (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 37)? The axiological belief in social constructivism involves the role of values, in that values are honored and negotiated between individuals (Creswell, 2013). Axiology incorporates the researcher’s values and assumptions into qualitative study (Hays & Singh, 2013).

Creswell (2013) held that constructivism’s goal is to depend as much as possible on the participants’ experiences and personal views concerning the research topic. According to Leedy

and Ormrod (2016), “constructivists focus their inquiries on people’s perceptions and interpretations of various phenomena, including individuals’ behaviors, group processes, and cultural practices” (p. 8). The constructivist approach is appropriate for the research because studying African American community college students focuses on their personal lived experiences, how their experiences influenced their choices, and their individual points of view.

In social constructivism, there is no one universal truth because there are multiple contextual perspectives and subjective voices (Creswell, 2013). Sometimes referred to as postmodernists, social constructivists hold that reality should never be considered objective because both researchers and study participants are biased, with different cultural experiences and identities (Creswell, 2013). The researcher in this belief system seeks to construct knowledge through social interactions that are influenced by cultural, historical, and political events (Creswell, 2013). As the students share and discuss their lived experiences as dual enrollment students, the meaning they create and that the researcher interprets falls well within this framework.

Social constructivism is an interpretive framework. As such, it is a social science theory that relies on the participants’ views of the situation (Creswell, 2013). However, the study is concerned with the equity of individuals and therefore a transformative framework is also appropriate. Transformative frameworks hold that knowledge is not neutral and has the capacity to reflect power and social societal relationships (Creswell, 2013). The purpose then becomes the creation of knowledge in order to assist marginalized groups and improve society (Creswell, 2013).

The purpose of the study was to gain insights into the phenomenon of dual enrollment by examining the perceptions of African American community college students who have

participated in dual enrollment prior to matriculating to community college. The study is both descriptive and exploratory and examines the student experience of African American students who have accumulated college credit prior to high school graduation and were later enrolled in credit courses in a community college. By providing comparisons between their high school dual enrollment and college experiences, the students will provide valuable insights. This study provides an opportunity for their thoughts and opinions to be heard and will add to the current body of literature.

A Note about Dual Enrollment Terminology

Programs where high school students earn college credits through a partnership with a college are identified by a variety of terms, including dual enrollment, dual credit, postsecondary enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and co-enrollment (Robertson, Chapman, & Gaskin, 2001). This complicates analysis of research because similar terms may be used to describe significantly different models of dual enrollment (Edwards & Hughes, 2011). Despite these differences, this literature review will use the term “dual enrollment” to describe a phenomenon where a high school student earns college credit in a high school environment, taught by a credentialed high school teacher, and the student receives both high school and college credit for the course.

History, Growth, and Development of Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment was first adopted in California in 1976, through a statute in the California Education Code, as a partnership between an institution of higher education and a local school division (California Education Code, 1976). The legislation required both the school divisions and the community colleges to award credit for the courses completed by the high school students (California Education Code, 1976). Dual enrollment, sometimes referred to as dual credit or concurrent enrollment, is part of a broader category of college or credit-based

transition programs including Advanced Placement (AP), the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, and early college high schools (ECHS) (Hoffman, 2012), and all provide students the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school. State leaders and legislators are proponents of dual enrollment programs as ways to support a successful transition between K-12 and post-secondary learning (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2015). Dual enrollment programs have additional benefits including decreasing time to degree attainment, providing pathways to the workforce, reducing tuition costs and, most significantly, facilitating college completion (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2015). Robertson et al. (2001) identified dual enrollment as a new and powerful program possessing the potential for transforming the educational outcomes of students, and the popularity of, interest in, scrutiny of, and participation in dual enrollment have expanded nationally.

California's early experiment was an effort to provide a smoother transition from high school to college for qualified high school students participating in either academic or vocational courses at community colleges. By the 2010-2011 academic year, the earliest for which national statistics are available, 1.4 million students were participating in dual enrollment programs (DOE, 2016). During that same 12-month period, 53% of all institutions reported high school students enrolled in courses for college credit within or outside of dual enrollment programs (Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013). Institutions reported that approximately 1,413,500 unduplicated high school students took courses for college credit either within a formal dual enrollment program or outside it in 2011-2012 (Marken et al., 2013).

Dual Enrollment Policy

As dual enrollment programs began to grow and spread nationally, they often developed as informal partnerships between community colleges and their local school divisions, without

any state policy guidance (Taylor, Borden & Park, 2015). This lack of guidance has led to a large variation in the ways in which dual enrollment is provided to students. Nationally, there is no single standard on the age or grade of students, college readiness requirements, qualifications of the teacher, and oversight of the program (Taylor et al., 2015). Factors such as these raise serious questions about the quality and rigor of dual enrollment programs. Recognizing the problems, states have made attempts, both mandatory and voluntary, to regulate dual enrollment programs (Taylor et al., 2015).

Colleges seeking the voluntary path can obtain national accreditation through the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). According to the NACEP website:

The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) works to ensure that college courses offered by high school teachers are as rigorous as courses offered on the sponsoring college campus. As the sole accrediting body for concurrent credit partnerships, NACEP helps these programs adhere to the highest standards so students experience a seamless transition to college and teachers benefit from meaningful, ongoing professional development. (NACEP, 2018, n.p.)

Taylor et al. (2015) conducted an analysis of state dual enrollment policies to understand course offerings, student eligibility, faculty credentialing, accountability processes, and enforcement. They found most states do not have specific policies about the types of courses that can be offered, although policies do exist about how developmental education and transfer courses are treated. States do not permit dual enrollment in developmental or remedial courses to be offered for college credit, and courses expected to transfer to four-year institutions must be listed in state transfer directories or articulation agreements (Taylor et al., 2015).

Forty of the fifty states mandate who can participate in dual enrollment programs and who can teach them (Taylor et al., 2015). Students must show college readiness by factors such as high school grade level, test scores, or high school grade point average, and half of all states have identical admission criteria for new, incoming students. Although half of the states regulate the credentials of teachers who are permitted to teach college-level courses in high schools, the other half do not, which again raises the quality concern. Some colleges use identical credentialing requirements for faculty regardless of location, but even this varies widely within states and nationally (Taylor et al., 2015).

One of the benefits of dual enrollment is the ability to complete college credits while in high school, credits that can be used to complete a degree at the community college or transferred to a four-year university. This disparity from state to state and within states raises serious issues about the transferability of dual enrollment courses to four-year schools. In Virginia, HB 1184 attempts to address this concern: “Credits earned by high school students who earn an associate degree from a Virginia community college while completing high school shall be transferrable to the four-year public institution of higher education to which they have been admitted” (HB 1184 § 23-9.6:1).

With regard to Federal policy, the Obama administration worked to expand postsecondary opportunities through efforts to redesign America’s high schools and through the former president’s vision of free community college. In May 2016, the Department of Education (DOE) announced the Dual Enrollment Pell Experiment in which, for the first time, students taking college courses could access Federal Pell Grants in high school (DOE, 2016). The Department of Education estimates approximately 10,000 high school students had the opportunity to qualify for nearly \$20 million in grant funds to participate in dual enrollment

programs across the country (DOE, 2016). In schools where cost is a barrier to racial minority and low socioeconomic students, this is a promising development. Less than 10% of children born in the bottom quartile of household incomes will attain a bachelor's degree by the time they turn 25, compared to 50% in the top quartile; yet earning a postsecondary credential is increasingly necessary for entry into the middle class (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Policies such as this are an important means to help students from low socioeconomic backgrounds gain access to coursework in high school that will prepare them for success in college. Despite this burgeoning access, dual enrollment opportunities are not being adopted equitably across student populations as more White, upper socioeconomic status students participate than racial minority, lower socioeconomic status students (An, 2013). As the Virginia Community College system maintains its mission of access for students, it must also acknowledge and address issues of equity. It is simply not enough to be equal if it is not also fair.

Dual Enrollment in Virginia

In 1988, the Secretary of Education for Virginia, Donald Finley, S. John Davis, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Jeff Hockaday, Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System, signed the Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment (Appendix A). The document was the result of a task force comprised of representatives from public instruction and the VCCS and it governed the partnership agreements between the public schools and the community colleges in Virginia (Catron, 2001). Although it outlined a framework for program offerings, it did not serve as official policy. Rather, the VCCS permitted each of the 23 community colleges in the system to structure programs to meet the needs of their regions and constituencies (Catron, 2001).

Components of the Virginia Plan. The Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment addressed key aspects of the program that were relevant at the time, such as course offerings, student eligibility, the awarding of credit, and faculty credentials (Catron, 2001). In order to provide incentives for participation, the plan allowed both the school and the college to receive state funding through average daily attendance and full-time equivalent credits, respectively. Although this was controversial, this structure still exists (Catron, 2001).

In the arena of tuition and fees, the language of the plan was deliberately vague and encouraged that the courses be offered at no cost to the student (Catron, 2001). Dual enrollment funding models are nearly as varied as delivery models. Until 2012 in the state of Virginia, dual enrollment costs varied from no cost at some community colleges to full tuition and fees charged at others, despite the fact that Virginia has a Community College system. Today, there is a reimbursement funding model in place where all colleges must reimburse at least 60% of the tuition cost to the high schools, with the remaining 40% to be negotiated between the colleges and the high schools they serve. Some schools pass the tuition cost to the parents, and some school divisions fund dual enrollment for their students. This has resulted in disparities and inequities for students who may live on the edge of one college's service region and are charged 40% of tuition for their dual enrollment course, while a friend at a nearby high school that is served by a different community college may not be charged at all. This inequity unduly affects low socioeconomic students and the schools that serve them.

What the plan did not address, and what would ultimately become a major criticism, is the area of assessment. Catron's (2001) article about the history of dual enrollment in Virginia is prescient in the identification of issues in Virginia dual enrollment programs, citing philosophical concerns about student maturity for college-level topics, the logistical challenges

of placement testing and registration at an off-campus site, the concern that the high school site is, by its nature, not collegiate, and growing worries about quality, rigor, and transferability.

The Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment gave latitude to each community college to develop programs that met the needs of their region (Catron, 2001). The result was 23 different ways of offering dual enrollment. In 2015, the VCCS attempted to address continuing concerns by developing and putting into policy the Governing Principles for Dual Enrollment (Appendix B) between Virginia Public Schools and the Virginia Community College System (VCCS, 2015). The principles were designed to provide a statewide framework for successful, quality dual enrollment partnerships between public schools and community colleges. As such, the principles encourage rigorous educational pursuits, promote a wider range of course options for high school students, and advance access to and success in higher education and the workplace (VCCS, 2015, p. 1).

The principles outlined clear eligibility and admission requirements, directed the community colleges to provide student support services, and provided extensive guidance about selection and responsibilities of dual enrollment faculty (VCCS, 2015). Going further, the plan outlined curriculum standards and contained a thorough section on program evaluation, including student learning outcomes and continuous improvement (VCCS, 2015). Despite these steps to improve the quality of dual enrollment programs in Virginia, the legislature had already started to take note and, on September 11, 2017, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) released its report on dual enrollment. The report noted concerns about the effectiveness of dual enrollment policies and the acceptance of dual credits by four-year institutions. It charged the Virginia Community College System, the Virginia Department of Education, and the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia to take action ensuring the

state's dual enrollment program was structured and implemented in a manner to maximize potential benefits to students (JLARC, 2017). Further, the three entities should ensure that dual enrollment courses contain the content and quality required for transfer (JLARC, 2017).

Dual Enrollment by the Numbers. To understand the scope of dual enrollment in Virginia, SCHEV provides some key data points: (a) the VCCS conducts 95% of high school dual enrollment activity; (b) high school dual enrollment increased by 55% in the VCCS from 2004-05 to 2013-14; (c) 15% of total VCCS enrollment consists of high school dual enrolled students; (d) 54% of high school dual enrolled students are female; (e) 74% of high school dual enrolled students are majority White students, compared to 82% in 2004-05, a decrease of eight percentage points; (f) data indicate the more high school dual enrollment credit earned prior to enrolling as a first-time college student, the higher the four-year completion rate at any institution in the Commonwealth (SCHEV, 2019-c). These data show a growing program of dual enrollment students with higher completion rates at four-year institutions and progress in the area of students of color, but nearly three quarters of dual enrollment participants are still majority White students.

Dual Enrollment Program Models

Dual enrollment is one of several programs that allow high school students to earn college credit while in high school. Advanced Placement (AP) courses and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs offer rigorous, college-level content culminating in an end-of-course exam (Edwards & Hughes, 2011). Depending on the score received, some colleges and universities may award college credit. Unlike AP and IB courses, dual enrollment courses are actual college courses and usually result in college grades on a college transcript (Karp, Bailey, Hughes, & Fermin, 2004). The challenge in interpreting research studies is in the wide variation

of programs. Karp et al. (2004) conducted a comprehensive review of state dual enrollment policies and noted extensive differences in student structure, eligibility, and implementation.

Program Structure

Dual enrollment courses may be offered in a variety of locations: on the high school campus, on the college campus, or in a high school building located on a college campus. These different locations have implications for student access, academic support services, and the authenticity, rigor, and quality of the courses (Edwards & Hughes, 2011). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that among institutions with a dual enrollment program, 83% reported courses within the program were taught at the college campus, 64% reported courses were taught at the high school campus, and 48% reported courses were taught through distance education (Marken et al., 2013). Location is important to the student experience: “Students in courses on the college campus have the opportunity to be immersed in college culture, experience college-level expectations, and be surrounded by college-going peer groups” (Edwards & Hughes, 2011, p. 13). However, offering courses on the college campus may impact underrepresented students, for whom transportation is a problem (Edwards & Hughes, 2011).

Student Eligibility

Traditionally, dual enrollment programs were aimed at high-achieving, academically proficient students who were considered capable of being successful at college-level work (Karp et al., 2004). As the body of evidence grows showing dual enrollment may provide successful outcomes for a wider range of students and that dual enrollment may help lower-achieving students by exposing them to rigorous college content (An, 2013), the question of eligibility standards arises. The issue of eligibility, however, also raises the issue of quality. If admission criteria are lowered to increase participation, college administrators and faculty become skeptical

of the rigor of the coursework, and concerns about accreditation arise (Taylor et al., 2015). According to the NCES, 60% of institutions reported that a minimum high school grade point average (GPA) was required in order to participate in the dual enrollment program (Marken et al., 2013). Other academic eligibility requirements reported by institutions included passing a college placement test (45%), a minimum score on a standardized test (43%), or a letter of recommendation (41%) (Marken et al., 2013). In fact, 46% of the institutions with a dual enrollment program reported that the academic eligibility requirements to participate in the dual enrollment program were the same as the admission standards for regular college students (Marken et al., 2013). In Virginia, the VCCS has admission criteria to participate in dual enrollment at either the transfer or career-technical level (VCCS, 2019b), and students must also meet all placement standards and prerequisites for any course taken.

Rigor and Quality

Another variable in dual enrollment program models is who teaches and what qualifications they possess. Only twelve states have policies regarding qualifications for dual enrollment instructors, but the presence of a policy is no measure of quality, as the qualifications range from strictly post-secondary faculty to permitting any secondary school teacher to teach a dual enrollment course (Karp et al., 2004). Between the two extremes lie a range of possibilities, the implications of which are the transferability of the courses (Karp et al., 2004). The policy in Georgia requires only post-secondary faculty teach dual enrollment courses, which has the benefit of removing any concern about the quality of the instruction; Wyoming's lack of any requirements leads to more teachers and more courses offered (Karp et al., 2004). At its June 2018 meeting, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC) introduced a new

policy for dual enrollment, illustrating its increasing importance as an element of accrediting rigor and quality (SACSCOC, 2018).

Early College Models

All early colleges are dual enrollment, but not all dual enrollment is early college. Early college programs suffer from the same deficit in definitions as general dual enrollment programs. Dual enrollment is the programmatic umbrella whenever a student is earning high school and college credit simultaneously for the same course. Early and middle colleges are a subset of the larger program. Generally, early college models have higher degrees of student support, may be cohort based, and lead to credential attainment.

Middle College High Schools

According to Born (2006), middle college–early college high schools combine high school with college in programs that graduate students with a high school diploma and an associate’s degree within five years. Established at LaGuardia Community College in 1974 as a means to “foster alternatives to negative youth behaviors” (Born, 2006, p. 50), they are combined institutions cosponsored by a community college and a school division and physically located on the college campus. These models offer accelerated academic experiences in supportive environments to traditionally underserved students (Born, 2006). Many middle colleges, such as the one at LaGuardia, are selective admission schools (Born, 2006; Munoz, Fischetti, & Prather, 2014).

Early College High Schools

The first Early College was established at Bard College in Massachusetts in 1964 (Fischetti, MacKain, & Smith, 2011; Munoz et al., 2014). Early college high schools operate under several key principles, including the belief that high school students can be successful at

college-level work at an earlier age and that they are appropriate for students who have not performed well in high school (Munoz et al., 2014). The Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) is a product of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Gates, 2005). Launched in 2002, ECHSIs have the primary goal of increasing students' access to a postsecondary credential (Haxton, Song, Zeiser, Berger, Turk-Bicakci, Knudson, & Hoshen, 2016). Early College High Schools differ from other dual enrollment programs in that they offer the opportunity to earn either an associate's degree or up to two years of college credit at no cost to the students, they offer this to all students, and they provide a wide variety of academic and social supports such as tutoring, study skills, self-advocacy, and other college success and life skills (Haxton et al., 2016; Munoz et al., 2014).

Haxton et al. (2016) found that being admitted to an ECHS had significant positive impacts on subsequent college enrollment and completion. While being admitted to an ECHS did not have significant impacts on high school graduation, the impact on racial minority and low-income students was notable, with the impact on college degree attainment stronger for racial minority and low socioeconomic students (Haxton et al., 2016). Another study in North Carolina showed that participation in an ECHS impacted several measures of student engagement, including higher attendance, lower rates of suspension, and reports of elevated expectations, more support, and rigorous academic experiences (Edmunds, Willse, Arshavsky, & Dallas, 2013). Fischetti et al. (2011) followed a cohort of ECHS students in their first year at the university and found that the students performed in a manner similar to other non-ECHS freshmen, but the study also raised several important questions. While demonstrating it is possible to compress the typical high school experience into two years, the study was not able to answer the question about the desirability of doing so (Edmunds et al., 2013). The students had

no room for electives in their curriculum and limited options for extracurricular activities, and there was also a concern that students may not be psychologically and socially mature enough to navigate university campus life (Fischetti et al., 2013).

While Early College programs fall under the umbrella of dual enrollment, their differences are important to note. The students apply to be admitted, attend class on the college campus and have specially trained teachers, small class sizes, and extensive supports (Edmunds et al., 2013; Fischetti et al., 2013; Haxton et al., 2016). As this is not the case at many large, comprehensive public high schools, one must question whether it is the dual enrollment participation or the location, caliber of teaching, and level of support that are impacting student outcomes.

College Readiness and Success Metrics

What constitutes college readiness? In 2007, Conley described it as “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit-bearing general education course” (p. 5). “Success” was further described as completing the course with a level of understanding and proficiency that made it possible for the student to progress to the next course in the sequence (Conley, 2007). By 2015, the author had updated his concept to include career readiness in a more comprehensive model designed to capture as many of the variables affecting readiness to succeed as possible (Conley, 2015). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 87% of entering students believe they are academically prepared for college level work (Harnisch & Lebioda, 2016). Unfortunately, despite their high aspirations, 67% of them will ultimately enroll in developmental or remedial education courses (Harnisch & Lebioda, 2016).

College readiness has been a growing concern among federal policymakers, state and local administrators, secondary schools, philanthropic organizations, educational policymakers, practitioners, and researchers (Tierney & Sablan, 2014). As the call for more students to obtain a postsecondary credential grows, more and more students arrive on college campuses unprepared or underprepared to succeed at college level work (Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014). At the national level, the Common Core Standards and increased college attendance rates have led to increased focus on the transition between secondary and post-secondary institutions (Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014). Policymakers identify the high levels of remediation in colleges and universities as an indicator that secondary schools are not providing an adequate preparation for college (Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014).

Dual Enrollment Influences on College Readiness

A key factor in students' success in college is their possession of qualifications and abilities that allow them to be considered for admission (Greene & Forster, 2003). High school graduates who are not college-ready face barriers to the higher incomes and increased opportunities that post-secondary education can provide (Greene & Forster, 2003). Dual enrollment influences college readiness in many ways, including allowing high school students to practice the role of a college student, gaining skills and experience in college expectations and successful behaviors (Karp, 2012).

GPA, Retention, and Completion

Colleges look at a number of factors when assessing the success of their students. Grade point average, fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall retention rates, on-time graduation rates, and transfer rates from community colleges to four-year institutions are but a few. Dual enrollment programs, in their various forms, have shown repeatedly that they improve these outcomes for students

(Allen & Dadgar, 2012; An, 2015; Andrews, 2004; Karp, 2012). Allen and Dadgar's (2012) study addressed the impact of dual enrollment on students' college credit accumulation, GPA, and retention. Using a sample of nearly 23,000 entering first-year students, the researchers concluded that completing one or more dual enrollment courses led to associated gains in credits earned in the first semester of college and a higher college GPA (Allen & Dadgar, 2012). This research was of particular interest because it controlled for a set of student demographic characteristics such as high school grades, test performance, and high school attended (Allen & Dadgar, 2012). After controlling for all these characteristics, a student who took one more dual enrollment course in CUNY's College Now program was associated with nearly one additional credit earned, 0.16 points higher first semester GPA, and a five percent greater likelihood of persisting to the second semester (Allen & Dadgar, 2012).

Melinda Mechur Karp (2012), a prolific dual enrollment researcher and author, asked a key question about the study of dual enrollment programs: if in reality most dual enrollment programs are intended for students who are already college ready, why would we consider it a strategy to increase student success in students who are already academically proficient? The importance and potential of dual enrollment has a more compelling explanation (Karp, 2012). Dual enrollment students learn about the role of college students and are able to practice college expectations. College readiness, Karp (2012) asserted, is about more than academic skill, as successful students must learn new ways of acting, interacting, and thinking. Dual enrollment programs help students understand and learn these role behaviors, which will increase the number of students who persist to graduation (Karp, 2012).

Motivation and Engagement

In a 2015 study, An examined whether dual enrolled students had higher levels of academic motivation and engagement during college when compared to non-dual enrolled students. This is an important distinction because much of the research looks at students during the dual enrollment experience itself or immediately after. An used a sample of 3,779 students from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, a longitudinal study of first-time college students who entered one of nineteen postsecondary schools, comprised of thirteen liberal arts colleges and six universities (An, 2015). Results of An's research showed positive effects on first-year GPA as well as motivation and engagement (2015). The total effect of dual enrollment on first-year GPA was larger in mid-selective and very selective institutions (An, 2015). This study added to a limited body of research about the impacts of dual enrollment and motivation, but it never defined the type or types of dual enrollment the students experienced. If all the dual enrollment occurred on a college campus, that is different than if it all took place on a high school campus, and that was a major limitation of this study.

Equity in Higher Education

Since the Civil War, attempts have been made by policymakers to address inequities for African Americans in higher education. From the development of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the first and second Morrill Land Grant acts, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and Affirmative Action, solutions have been sought to increase African American participation in post-secondary education (Harper et al., 2009). Decades of well-meaning policy efforts have not closed the achievement gap for African American post-secondary students; this failure may be due to factors such as racially biased admission practices, opposition to Affirmative Action policies, desegregation of HBCUs, and inequitable funding practices (Harper

et al., 2009). Although other races and ethnicities have enjoyed increased participation in dual enrollment, African American students continue to lag behind and are not reaping the benefits such participation would provide. This inequity is negatively impacting African American students in Virginia.

Equity, Equality, and Fairness

Equity has become a popular term and is showing up increasingly in the vision and mission statements of various organizations and in titles of conferences, plenary addresses, breakout sessions, and meetings at local, state, and national levels (Putnam-Walkerly & Russell, 2016). The Glossary of Education Reform (2016) notes that equity in education denotes the idea of fairness. Equity includes the program models and strategies that might be valued as fair but might not automatically be equal (Glossary of Education Reform, 2016).

Equity and equality are two strategies we can use in an effort to produce fairness. Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful. Equality is treating everyone the same. Equality aims to promote fairness, but it can only work if everyone starts at the same place and needs the same help. Equity appears unfair, but it actively moves everyone closer to success by leveling the playing field. (Sun, 2014)

Equity is distinct from terms that usually accompany it, such as diversity, inclusion, and equality. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014) makes important distinctions between equity and diversity, inclusion, and equality. Diversity, described by the Foundation, is a numerical description of different types of people (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). Inclusion is a state of being included within a structure and may lead toward increased equity, but simply being included in a group may not lead to experiencing equity (Putnam-Walkerly & Russell, 2016.) Equality is further described as a condition where everyone has the same amount of something,

whether it be a physical item like food or something non-physical like opportunity (Putnam-Walkerly & Russell, 2016.) Equity, then, is more complex and “is about each of us getting what we need to survive or succeed—access to opportunity, networks, resources, and supports—based on where we are and where we want to go” (Putnam-Walkerly & Russell, 2016, n.p.). It is the latter part of the definition that contains the critical ingredient: based on where we are and where we want to go. For college students, this may be their position from a college readiness standpoint, and what their ultimate educational aspirations are.

Improving Equity for African American Students

Despite the myriad policies aimed at closing the college opportunity gaps between African American students and their White peers throughout history, too few African Americans are offered access to the socioeconomic advantages afforded by degree attainment (Harper, et al., 2009). The pervasive low level of academic achievement by racial and ethnic minorities continues to be a national concern (Bowman, et al., 2018). Although policy efforts enacted through the late 1960s opened many doors for African American students, to say the nation has approached anything close to equitable would be a “gross understatement” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 397). Despite nearly a century of policy efforts on behalf of African American students, they have been undermined by a series of factors, among them underrepresentation of African American students at predominantly white institutions, attempts to dismantle affirmative action, and low African American male persistence and degree completion rates (Harper et al., 2009). Greater access to the public good of higher education is beneficial to society as a whole, when more Americans across racial/ethnic groups earn college degrees and assume societal roles that enhance global competitiveness, decrease crime and poverty, and help the US enact its professed democratic ideals (Harper et al., 2009; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005;). Programs like

dual enrollment, with strong research showing their promise in increasing African American students' success in college, are an important means of increasing access to the public good and economic prosperity.

Access and Equity Issues in Dual Enrollment

The relationship between socioeconomic background and academic achievement has been established, with studies showing the differences in socioeconomic status (SES) accounting for most of the Black-White achievement gap (An, 2013; Freyer & Levitt, 2004). Many dual enrollment programs have academic requirements, like GPA in Florida, or placement testing in Virginia. In Virginia, high school students must meet dual enrollment admission criteria, as well as placement and prerequisite requirements for dual enrollment courses. These factors, viewed as upholding the academic integrity of dual enrollment courses, also serve as barriers to participation for some racial minority and lower socioeconomic status students.

As open access institutions, community colleges are increasingly serving diverse populations (Garibaldi, 2014; Renn & Reason, 2013), which are disproportionately female and African American or Latino (Goldrick-Rab & Cook, 2013). Garibaldi (2014) found these populations had lower retention and graduation rates in comparison to non-White high school students and that they had lower levels of college enrollment and completion. This lack of completion from these populations exacerbates the gender disparity at upper levels of education as well, impacting male, African American, and Latino enrollment in graduate and professional programs (Garibaldi, 2014).

Nationally, the most recent available data shows that in 2012-2013 11.8% of White high school seniors participated in dual enrollment, however, only 5.3% of African American students did the same (NCES, 2015). The lack of racial minority student participation in dual enrollment

is troubling, given the research showing racial minority students were 26% more likely to enroll in college and 14% more likely to complete than their non-dual enrolled peers (Taylor et al., 2015). Although impressive, these outcomes present a challenge for policymakers because the positive effect for racial minority students is smaller than the average effect, suggesting that state dual enrollment policies do not benefit all students equally (Taylor et al., 2015). Taylor and colleagues argue that the “credit-only” model discounts the non-cognitive and psychosocial skills that indicate college readiness, which might be especially important for racial minority students whose experiences prior to college may not provide the abilities to be successful in college. Programs designed to develop and support these factors, such as Early College High Schools (ECHS), which provide comprehensive supports for academic and social behaviors, would better prepare these students.

The Achievement Gap

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2013) defined the educational achievement gap thusly: “the achievement gap occurs when one group of students outperforms another group and the difference between the two groups is statistically significant” (para. 1) Greene et al. (2008) identify the achievement gap between ethnic groups as one of “the most unrelenting challenges confronting higher education” (p. 514). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Asians outperform other groups in degree-granting institutional enrollment. In 2005, 63% of students enrolled were Asian, compared to 42% White students, 35% African American students and 37% Hispanic 18-24 year-olds (Musu-Gillete, de Brey, McFarland, Hussar & Sonnenberg, 2017). Bailey, Jenkins, and Leinbach (2005) reported only 7.9% of African American students who began at community college between 1995 and 1996 completed an associate’s degree within six years. By contrast, 17%, more than twice the number, of their

White counterparts did so (Bailey et al., 2005). The pattern continued when students transferred from community colleges to four-year institutions, with 16% of African American students successfully transferring compared to 32% for White students.

Certain characteristics have been identified that increase students' risk of not being successful in college. The U.S. DOE (2004) identified seven: delaying post-secondary enrollment, not finishing high school, being financially independent from parents, being a single parent, having dependents other than a spouse, part-time college enrollment, and full-time employment. These characteristics mirror those possessed by many community college students, who generally deal with more academic risk than their peers at four-year schools (Greene et al., 2008). Nearly 60% of community college students require remedial or developmental education. African American students are twice as likely as White students to need at least one developmental course and are 39% less likely to persist and earn a credential (USDOE, 2004).

While these statistics and this problem are not new, dual enrollment has been shown to increase student success outcomes for all students. The fact that African American participation rates lag means an opportunity to close this gap is not being realized.

Influences of Dual Enrollment Programs on Racial Minority and Low-Income Students

High SES parents are more likely to be highly involved and invested in their child's college and post-secondary decisions than low SES parents, who tend to focus on responsibilities that foster natural growth (food and safety) rather than educational responsibilities (An, 2013). "Educational attainment requires a series of decisions that affect both the continuation or termination of schooling and the curricular pathways in which students participate" (An, 2013, p. 409). Low SES parents engage less with school officials and teachers than high SES parents, many of whom micromanage their children's college preparation and application experience

(Lareau & Weininger, 2008). Not only do middle and high SES parents have the actual experience of attending college themselves, they are able to procure school resources and academic programs that improve their child's prospects for admission to colleges (Lareau & Weininger, 2008).

In a study estimating the effects on first-year GPA and the effects of remediation, An (2013) found a positive influence of dual enrollment on academic performance and college readiness. More significantly, first generation dual enrollment students performed better than non-participants (An, 2013). The study also found that the dual enrollment influence was equal across all levels of parental education, suggesting dual enrollment "may increase academic performance for a wider range of students than these programs originally intended" (p. 425).

Summary

This chapter has provided the conceptual framework for the study as well as an overview of the literature on the historical growth of dual enrollment programs, both nationally and in the Commonwealth of Virginia. National and state policies with regard to dual enrollment have been reviewed, as well as current legislative concerns about the quality of dual enrollment programs in Virginia. The variety of dual enrollment models was described, and their contributions to the literature outlined. Literature on college success, its indicators, and how it is impacted by dual enrollment, as well as some significant studies, was discussed. Finally, the growth in dual enrollment participation is not being felt equitably by all student populations, and research on access, equity, and the part dual enrollment may play in increasing equity for all students was examined.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences that influenced African American students' choice to participate in dual enrollment programs at a large, suburban community college. Despite the growth and popularity of dual enrollment, and the research that indicates it contributes to positive student outcomes for students across race and socioeconomic status, the low participation rate among African American students means these benefits are not being afforded to this population of students (An, 2013).

African American high school juniors and seniors in Virginia are not dual enrolled at rates that would advance their participation in higher education and the economic benefits that accompany higher degree attainment (SCHEV, 2019-b). In the 2017 academic year, African American high school juniors and seniors (the grades eligible for dual enrollment) accounted for 24% of total juniors and seniors in Virginia. White juniors and seniors accounted for 54% of the junior/senior population. Although they account for 24% of the population, only 12% of African American students participated in dual enrollment that year, while 67% of White students did. African American high school students participated in dual enrollment at about half the rate of their representation in the population, while White student participated at rates 13 percentage points higher than their portion of the eligible population. Figure 2 shows a comparison of participation rates for African American students and White students.

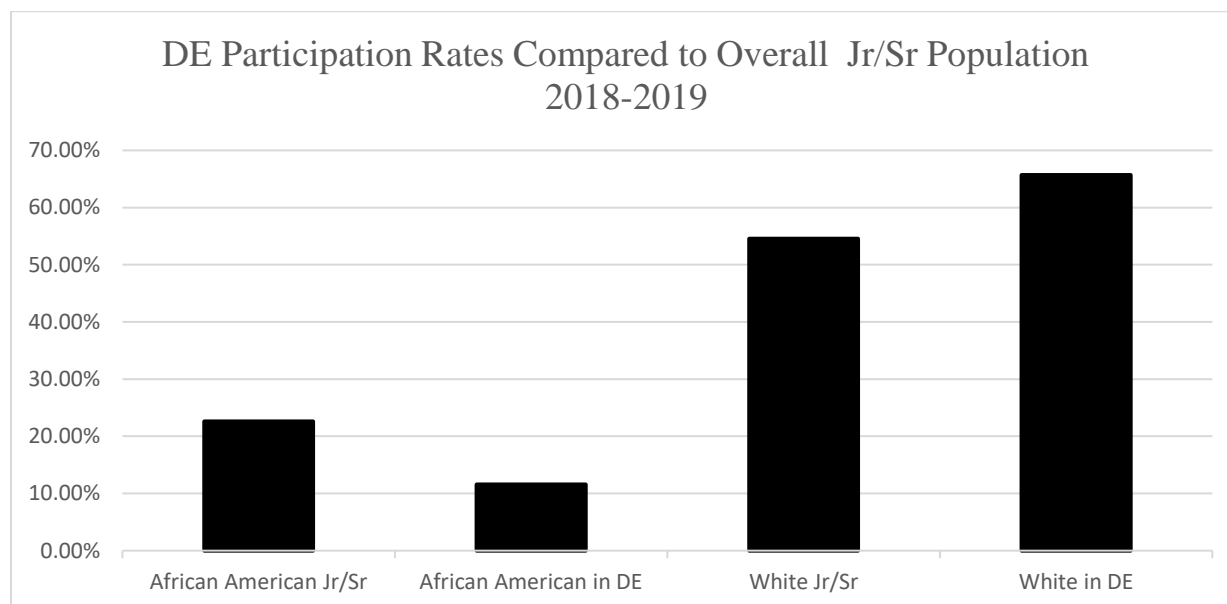


Figure 2. Comparison of participation rates for African American and White High School Juniors and Seniors.

Although the percentages have declined in the past five years for White student representation in dual enrollment, they still participate at rates beyond their overall portion of the population, and African American students participate at much lower rates. This study explored the experiences that influence African American community college students' decision to participate in dual enrollment while in high school and how that experience influenced subsequent college-going decision-making. This research attempts to tell the stories of how students ultimately ended up in dual enrollment courses, how they selected their first course, and how the experience after the decision impacted further college-going decisions.

Chapter Three details the methods and procedures used to design and implement this study and explains the researcher's methodological choices. It presents an overview of qualitative research and its connection to the methodology, and provides a description of the

project's methodological approach, research setting, and participants. Finally, it explains how the data were collected, managed, and interpreted.

Research Method

The research method for this study was qualitative. All qualitative approaches share two qualities: they typically focus on phenomena that occur in natural settings, and they involve capturing and studying the complexity of those phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Qualitative research is appropriate in seeking to “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Qualitative research recognizes the many dimensions and layers of the issue to be studied and attempts to capture and show its multifaceted form (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Further, qualitative research seeks to assess participants' intentionality, or their internal experience of being conscious of something (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Research Design

The research design was phenomenological. By attempting to understand the life-world of a participant, this method of research searches for commonalties across participants to see how their lived experiences relate to a phenomenon, in this case dual enrollment participation (Hays & Singh, 2012). Creswell (2013) delineated the basic purpose of phenomenological research as “reduc[ing] individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 76). A phenomenological approach is appropriate because the viewpoints and personal experiences of the African American students who participated in dual enrollment will be used to understand what factors have influenced them in their collegiate experience. These students' perceptions about participation in dual enrollment courses both at high school and on the college campus will be explored to develop a description of the student experience.

Creswell (2013) defined a phenomenological study as describing “the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon.

Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (p. 76). It is important to observe phenomena as they occur as they can become units of knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological approach is selected as the most appropriate means of understanding the individual human experience to develop a “composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Hays & Singh, 2015, p. 76).

The purpose of the study was to gain insights into the phenomenon of dual enrollment by examining the influences on dual enrollment decision making and subsequent college-going behavior in African American community college students. The study was both descriptive and exploratory and examined the student experience of African American community college students who participated in dual enrollment while in high school and, after graduation, were enrolled in credit courses in a community college. It is the hope that providing the stories of the elements that influenced their decision making will provide valuable insights on college-going decision-making and behavior. There is scant research in the literature about how access to dual enrollment increases college readiness and how students are influenced in high school to make decisions regarding postsecondary education that will have profound impacts on their futures (An, 2013). This study adds to the research on those influences.

Research Foci

The central question explores what influences African American community college students’ decision to participate in dual enrollment while in high school and how the experience influenced subsequent college-going choices.

- 1) What influences African American high school students to decide to participate in a dual enrollment program in high school?
- 2) How does their experience in dual enrollment programs influence their college-going decision-making?

Research Setting and Participants

The setting for the study is a large, comprehensive community college located in a metropolitan area with a population of 513,704 in 2019, according to the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) (VEC, 2019). Founded in 1967, VA Community College (VACC) serves four cities and two counties. VACC is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award associate degrees. The college offers six transfer associate degree programs, 21 career and technical associate degree programs, seven certificate programs, and 27 career studies certificate programs.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the State Council on Higher Education reports 158,220 students were enrolled in community colleges in Fall 2018 (SCHEV, 2019-a). White students accounted for 57% of that number and African American students comprised 18% of enrollments. The remaining 25% were comprised of foreign, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan native, and multi-race. According to SCHEV, in Fall 2018, 66% of students participating in dual enrollment were White and 12% were African American. VACC served 11,588 students in the 2018-2019 academic year, of which 30% were African American and 48% were White (SCHEV, 2019-b).

VA Community College has dual enrollment arrangements with five public school divisions and three private schools. In these arrangements, the courses are taught at the high school by high school teachers. Both the curricula of the college courses and the high school

teachers are approved by the college, as required by the Virginia Community College Plan for Dual Enrollment (Appendix A) and the Governing Principles of Dual Enrollment (Appendix B) (VCCS, 1998; VCCS, 2015). High school teachers must meet the same criteria to teach as adjunct faculty and courses must have the same learning outcomes. Every attempt is made to have the collegiate curricula of the dual enrollment courses align as closely as possible with the curricula of the same courses taught on the college campus.

In the academic year 2017-2018, VA Community College served 1,154 dual enrollment students, of which 48% were white and 26% were African American (SCHEV, 2019-b).

Table 2 describes shows the dual enrollments at VA Community College over the last five years.

Table 2

Dual Enrollment Trends by Race at VA Community College

Academic Year	African American Students % of DE population	White students % of DE population	Total dual enrolled Population
2013-2014	24	56	1274
2014-2015	15	64	977
2014-2015	23	54	850
2016-2016	25	49	878
2017-2018	26	48	1154

Although dual enrollment comprises a significant portion of overall full-time equivalent students (FTEs) at some VCCS colleges, VACC has maintained a smaller portion, approximately seven percent, over the past few years. The long-standing partnerships between the college and the local secondary schools made VACC a suitable site for the research study. The increase in

African American dual enrollment participation from 2014-2015 to 2017-2018 made the institution a good candidate for research, as the number of African American dual enrolled students was higher than the state percentage and likely to result in a suitable sample.

Sample

The study recruited participants using a stratified purposeful sampling strategy. Creswell (2013) identified three considerations for a purposeful sampling approach, which include the decision as to whom to select, the specific sampling strategy, and the size of the sample to be studied. As this was a phenomenological study, all participants had to have experience with the dual enrollment phenomena to be studied. As noted in Creswell (2013), researchers should be flexible about their sampling strategy and may often use more than one type of sampling strategy for their study. The researcher also used elements of maximum variation sampling to ensure a cross-section of students with different experiences as dual enrollment students, which, according to Creswell (2013), is “an ideal in qualitative research” (p. 157). Maximum variation sampling allows the researcher to have diverse sites, in this case, different high schools across the college’s service region. It is also the method of sampling that provides the most varied perspectives (Creswell, 2013). These methods are to ensure that all participants have the common experience of being African American students taking dual enrollment courses both at the high school and on the community college campus. The population for this research study was comprised of African American students who had completed dual enrollment courses while in high school and who subsequently enrolled at VACC after graduation within the previous four semesters (Spring 17, Fall 17, Spring 18, Fall 18). Students self-select their race on the college admission application, and students who selected Black or African American were included in the population.

There are five public high school divisions in the VA Community College Service region, and all of them have dual enrollment programs in partnership with VACC in which instruction is provided by qualified teachers in the high schools. These five school divisions are comprised of 13 high schools. Table 3 provides demographic information for each school.

Table 3

Characteristics of High Schools Served by VA Community College

School Division	High School	African American Jr/Sr	White Jr/Sr	% African American Jr/Sr	% White Jr/Sr
School Division 1	HS A	509	138	68.14	18.47
	HS B	488	55	77.22	8.7
	HS C	323	334	41.46	42.88
	HS D	313	76	69.87	16.96
School Division 2	HS E	315	129	52.5	21.5
	HS F	457	36	85.74	6.75
	HS G	273	358	36.45	47.8
	HS I	366	233	49.59	31.57
	HS J	492	201	55.41	22.64
School Division 3	HS K	3	291	.9	87.65
School Division 4	HS L	60	473	9.06	71.45
	HS M	110	296	20.6	55.43
	HS N	141	404	20.7	59.32
School Division 5	HS O	62	123	25	49.6
	HS P	67	365	11.36	61.86
	HS Q	61	349	10.59	60.59
	HS R	56	335	11	65.82

(DOE, 2019)

The Role of the Researcher

The researcher has a long history of association with dual enrollment programs. VA Community College made a strategic decision in 2007 to expand its dual enrollment program away from career and technical courses to those designed to transfer to four-year institutions for lower level general education requirements. This intentional expansion allowed the researcher a view into dual enrollment from the ground up. Working with academic deans and acting as a coordinator and liaison between the high school administrators, counselors, and teachers and the community college administrators, academic deans, and academic advisors provided a solid foundation.

Since 2007, the researcher has moved into different roles, but dual enrollment has remained an area of responsibility and interest. The proximity to community college system office leadership conversations about dual enrollment has placed the researcher in an ideal space to understand the program. With program growth in the state came concerns about quality and rigor, increased legislative interest, and discussions about national accreditation. Dual enrollment in Virginia became increasingly prominent in VCCS leadership meetings, leading to a philosophical dilemma about the cost of providing dual enrollment without impacting access.

This background provides two things: an expansive experience and a potential for bias. It was important for the researcher not to focus on attempting to make interpretations, but instead to focus on the experience of the student participants (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche is the process where a researcher makes deliberate and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments, preconceptions, beliefs and knowledge in order to be open when hearing the student participants describing their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative data analysis can be “vulnerable to a researcher’s predispositions, expectations, biases, and values” (Leedy & Ormrod, p. 301).

Therefore, it was important to take measures to enhance the validity and credibility of findings. Data were collected until no new insights, perceptions, or understandings were gained, or saturation of the data occurred (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016; Creswell, 2013). Because qualitative study designs are so varied, there is no one-size-fits-all way to attain data saturation; rather, data saturation is about the depth of the data, not the numbers of interviews (Ness, 2015). Member checking was conducted, and each participant was provided the transcribed copy of their interview.

Data Collection and Procedures

This study utilized a phenomenological approach. The use of phenomenological methods is appropriate when seeking to understand the students' lived experiences, impressions, perceptions and beliefs. African American community college students were invited to participate in a dual enrollment research study where they would be interviewed and given the opportunity to share their experiences. It is important to understand these experiences and add to the body of literature, in order to develop, design, and promote dual enrollment programs in high schools that attract an equitable population of students, thus spreading the benefits of dual enrollment participation across a wider, more diverse width and breadth of students.

Prior to data collection, an application for approval to use human subjects was made to the Old Dominion University Institutional Review Board. Once granted, a Request to Conduct Research was submitted to the VA Community College Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IRE), the community college selected for the study. Once approved, a request for student information to be queried from the Student Information System (SIS) was submitted through

IRE. The list requested only student email contact information; all other demographic data would be collected by the researcher in the interviews.

Sample Selection. The population for the study included all African American students who had completed at least one dual enrollment course with VA Community College while in high school, who had subsequently matriculated to VACC after graduation within the previous four semesters (Spring 17, Fall 17, Spring 18, Fall 18) and who were currently enrolled in the spring of 2019. Dual enrollment was the phenomenon being explored; therefore, all participants must have experienced it and be able to articulate those lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The sampling strategy was stratified purposeful sampling to select the unique participants for the study. Stratified purposeful sampling was selected in order to identify the sub-group, African American community college students with dual enrollment experience, from the whole population of community college students with dual enrollment experience. Stratified purposeful sampling is the strategy that best facilitates comparisons among participants (Creswell, 2013). The query ultimately identified 69 students who met the criteria.

Once a dataset of potential participants based on chosen criteria was collected, the official college email system was used to send out an initial contact email (see Appendix C), informing potential participants about the study, inviting them to participate, and ensuring them that confidential and personally identifying information would be protected. Students were offered a \$50 gift card as an incentive to participate in the study. Those who replied affirmatively were sent a more formalized email (Appendix D) which contained more detailed information about the study. Drawing on work of other qualitative researchers, Creswell (2013) suggested a sample of up to ten individuals as an ideal sample size for a phenomenological study. Leedy and Ormrod

(2016) recommended a sample size between five and 25 individuals who all have directly experienced the phenomenon under study.

Student Participant Recruitment. Upon receipt of the email addresses for the 69 students, the initial email was sent to the students' official college email addresses. The initial email was brief, simply asking if students were interested in participating in dual enrollment research and offering a \$50 Visa gift card. The email also stated that the researcher had approval from Old Dominion University and VA Community College to conduct research with students. The initial email resulted in eighteen positive responses. These students were emailed the second recruitment email, which gave the details of the study, acknowledged the researcher's position as an administrator, and offered dates and times for interviews. Fourteen students responded favorably to the second recruitment email and set appointments. Of the fourteen, eleven successful interviews were conducted.

An effort was made to address concerns about the race of the researcher (white), and the position held at the college (administrator), fearing this might reduce the value and honesty of the data. That effort involved having African American community college students, known to the researcher, conduct the interviews. This effort was ultimately unsuccessful as the schedules of the student participants and the student interviewers were too difficult to coordinate. In fact, after the first student was rescheduled several times, that participant stopped responding. In order to keep the study on track, the decision was made to proceed with the researcher conducting the interviews.

After the first round of emails was sent and the first set of responders interviewed over a two-week period in March 2019, a second set was sent to all who had not responded initially. This resulted in a smaller response of four additional students. Those students were scheduled for

interviews the last week of March 2019. Although all eleven interviews were conducted, saturation occurred after the ninth interview, with no new themes or perceptions emerging.

Sample Size and Saturation. Sample size in qualitative research depends on the degree to which the purpose of the research is met (Hays & Singh, 2012). The sample size should be aligned with the fewest number of participants needed to represent the phenomenon being studied (Hays & Singh, 2012). Saturation of the data occurs when no new information, perspectives, or beliefs are being added to the data. This appeared to be occurring at the ninth interview; however, two more had been scheduled and these were conducted as well as a means to ensure saturation had occurred. Ultimately, from a population of 69 students who met the criteria, eleven African American community college students were interviewed about their perceptions of their dual enrollment experience in high school.

Table 4

Characteristics of the Study Participants

Student Participant	Gender	Number of Dual Enrollment Courses Taken	Self-Reported Courses Taken	Self-Reported Grade in DE Courses	High School Characteristics AA% to White%	Number of semesters at VACC
Andy	M	2	2 ADJ	Cs	12 to 62	3
Ben	M	1	1 PLS	C	55 to 23	2
Carly	F	2	2 HIS	As	55 to 23	2
Diane	F	2	1 MTH, 1 ENG	F/C	77 to 9	5
Emma	F	4	2 HIS, 2 ENG	Bs	77 to 9	4
Fay	F	4	1 MTH, 1 SCI, 2 ENG	As, Bs, Cs	55 to 23	2
Gwen	F	2	2 ENG	Bs	21 to 60	6
Helen	F	1	1 HIS	A	21 to 55	8
Ian	M	2	2 ENG	Bs	21 to 60	3

Julia	F	2	2 CHD?	Didn't recall	68 to 18	5
Kate	F	2	2 ADJ	As	11 to 62	6

The study participants were 73% female. Six out of 24 high schools were represented in the sample. Students' dual enrollment experiences ranged from one class prior to matriculating to four classes, with most of the students, seven, completing two courses. Five students had completed four or more semesters at VACC, and two students were within one semester of graduating.

Interview Procedure

Students who responded to the initial email were sent the second message (Appendix D) with more details about the study and an invitation to select dates and times on a Doodle poll that was anonymous—they could not see each other's names. The researcher followed up by email to confirm dates and times with student participants. The interviews were conducted on campus, which made it easy for students to participate between or after classes. The interviews took place in a neutral conference room in one of the academic buildings. The conference room was not near the researcher's office, and there were no personal effects of any kind in the room.

Prior to the first interview, a pilot interview was conducted with a student worker known to the researcher. Using Rowley's (2012) framework of ensuring that the interviewee understands the questions, the goal of the pilot interview was to ensure that the questions were not leading, did not include multiple questions in one, could not be answered with just yes or no, were not too vague, and were not invasive. The student reported that the questions invited students to share their beliefs and thoughts, were easy to understand, and were not in any way

invasive. The student reported that the research participants would be unlikely to have difficulty sharing their experiences based on the questions asked.

The interviews were conducted as described in the methodology. Brinkman and Kvale (2015) held that the first few minutes of an interview are critical. Before an interviewee will feel comfortable speaking freely and sharing their experiences with a stranger, they want to have an impression of the interviewer that makes this safe (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015) This was attained by utilizing the following guidance: attentive listening, demonstrating interest in the responses, showing understanding, being respectful of what the participants said, and being relaxed and at ease about the topic (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Students were greeted warmly with some brief rapport-building comments about difficulty in finding the conference location, weather, and appreciation for coming to the interview on time. Following the interview protocol, the Informed Consent Form was reviewed, signed, and a copy given to the participant. The interviews ranged in length from 18 minutes to 47 minutes. The interviews were recorded and uploaded to a professional transcription service. The researcher also made notes immediately after each interview to capture impressions during the interview of the participants' body language, demeanor, level of comfort, eye contact, ease and willingness to answer. The participants' body language, expressions and voice that accompany the answers to the questions provide additional data to the participants' responses (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Generally, the more semesters a student had at VA Community College, the more they wanted to talk about their dual enrollment experience. The Informed Consent Forms and transcribed interviews were placed in a file and are now locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's office.

The site selected for the in-person interviews was a small conference room on campus, which was comfortable, quiet, and private. Qualitative interviews are not tightly structured and

have more of an informal, friendly feel to them when compared to quantitative interviews (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016) and for this reason, a site was selected that was not overly formal or intimidating. The interviewees were provided the informed consent forms and invited to ask any questions or voice any concerns. The interviews were recorded, and this was explained to the participants. The informed consent, demographic data, and interview transcripts were scanned electronically into a password-protected file and paper copies stored in locked files in the researcher's office.

This study utilized semi-structured interviews as the means for collecting the primary data. Semi-structured interviews allow some freedom during the interview because the interview protocol serves as a guide, but once the interview begins the interviewee has more impact on the structure and process (Hays & Singh, 2012). Every interview question does not have to be asked, the questions do not have to be asked in the same order, and additional interview questions can be added to create a unique interview that caters to completely describing the interviewee's experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). While this approach does not guarantee consistency of data across participants, it includes more participant voices and provides a richer picture of the phenomenon of dual enrollment participation (Hays & Singh, 2012).

An interview blueprint (Appendix F) was used to guide the selection of questions. With the research foci in mind, the questions were developed with seven stages of dual enrollment knowledge and centered around what influenced their dual enrollment participation in high school and what influenced their college-going decision making. An interview protocol (Appendix E) was used to guide the interview process. The interview questions were divided into sections to address the sub-questions of high school/college comparisons, academic preparation, college success, conceptions of readiness, and social readiness for college. The questions were

structured to ensure all relevant data were captured, yet flexible enough to follow any emerging themes or unexpected topics that developed during the interview itself. A pilot interview was conducted with the first interview subject to test the interview protocol and get feedback on the selection of questions. Pilot testing the interview questions helps identify any problems and weaknesses with the interview design and allows for adjustments, additions, and/or corrections before the implementation of the actual study. Pilot tests also allow researchers to hone and improve research questions (Turner, 2010).

Two digital recording devices were used, one primary and one backup. Notes documented the date and time of each interview and described impressions of the interview and the interviewee. Following the interviews, the digital data files were provided to a transcription service for verbatim transcribing. This allowed for the coding to begin with the interview fresh in the researcher's mind. The transcription of the interview was provided to each of the participants to give them the opportunity to comment on the transcript, give additional commentary, or clarify anything in the interview.

Data Analysis

The social constructivist perspective relies heavily on the experiences and personal views of the participants with regard to the research topic, in this case their dual enrollment experience. In analyzing the data, the researcher was informed by focusing the inquiry on the students' perceptions of their experiences, how they interpreted those perceptions, and how their behaviors and those of others around them influenced them in order to understand and perceive their lived experiences. There is a substantial body of literature that supports a rationale for encouraging dual enrollment participation among all students, but how are the students perceiving opportunities to enroll in college courses while still in high school? Dual enrollment has been

shown to increase college readiness (An, 2015; Edmunds, Bernstein, Unlu, Glennie, Willse, Smith & Arshavsky, 2012), improve overall success (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; Jones, 2014); strengthen engagement (Edmunds, et al., 2013), and improve outcomes for racial minority students (Ganzert, 2012). With all these measurable success outcomes, how do the students themselves perceive the influences of dual enrollment? Using the current literature as a framework, the voices of the students through their interviews were examined and discussed through qualitative analysis.

Qualitative data analysis is a cyclical process of reducing data, displaying data, drawing conclusions, and verification (Hays & Singh, 2012). Qualitative data analysis involves categorizing similar text or keywords, as well as connecting text or keywords that influence each other, i.e., coding (Hays & Singh, 2012). Strategies for analyzing qualitative data are not as prescriptive as those for analyzing quantitative data and tend to rely more on inductive reasoning processes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Researchers in qualitative studies impose specific meanings on observations and code them in a way that allows the researcher to draw conclusions about the general situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The researcher utilized Creswell's (2013) approach to phenomenological analysis, which includes personal descriptions of the phenomenon to be studied, listing important and significant responses from the interviews, grouping the statements into themes, describing what happened to the participant and how it happened, and ultimately synthesizing the "what" and the "how" into a composite description. This was accomplished by the creation and organization of detailed files for the data, which were coded and grouped into meaningful units. The final description is known as the "essence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 194) and was presented in narration and tables.

The student interviews were professionally transcribed into electronic documents for ease of organization and analysis. Handwritten field notes and observations were also typed and stored electronically. A tactic to begin the process of making meaning of the data was to create a list of potentially helpful ways to code the data. This was accomplished by deriving themes from the research problem and elements of the conceptual framework. Where possible, sub-codes were added to provide more precise analysis. The data coding process was intensive, as the data needed to be divided into units that could be individually coded. With verbal data such as interviews, the data needed to be broken down systematically into small segments, such as individual sentences, that could be coded separately (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

Leedy and Ormrod (2016) recommended a pilot test of the initial list of codes to determine “whether it will adequately capture the multidimensional meaning that the data hold” (p. 293). This pilot test allows the researcher to correct coding weaknesses where the initial codes are too vague, too specific, redundant, overlapping, or missing altogether. The results of the pilot test provide a final set of codes and sub-codes that can be described specifically and concretely. The goal of such an endeavor is to achieve reasonable consistence, or reliability, in the coding process (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

Interpreting qualitative data is an iterative process (Creswell, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Creswell (2013) discussed a data analysis spiral that calls for four steps: organization, perusal, classification, and synthesis. Creswell adapted a structured method of analysis for phenomenological research that begins with the description of the researcher’s own experiences, which is an attempt to set aside, or bracket, the researcher’s own experiences (Creswell, 2013). Next, the researcher identifies and develops a list of significant, discrete, and non-repeated statements (horizontalization of the data) (Creswell, 2013). The meaningful statements are then

grouped into themes. Now the researcher can address what the participants experienced with the phenomenon. Known as the “textural description” (Creswell, 2013, p. 193), this part of the process includes verbatim examples of what the participants experienced. After the textural description, the researcher develops the “structural description” (Creswell, 2013, p. 194), which explains “how” the experience happened. In this case, the study described how a student becomes a dual enrollment student: the steps they take and the environment they might experience along the way. Finally, the research resulted in the combination of both textural and structural descriptions into a composite description of the experience. This narrative provides the essence of the experience and explains both what participants experienced and how the participants experienced a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Upon receipt of the transcribed interviews, the simplified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was used to analyze the data. Moustakas (1994) modified this method in the book *Phenomenological Research Methods*, and Creswell (2013) offered a simplified approach that was appropriate for this study. Creswell’s (2013) approach is comprised of six elements: a description of personal experiences, a list of significant statements, grouping of significant statements, a description of what was experienced, a description of how the experience happened and finally, the composite of what and how into the essence of the experience.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is a higher education professional with 12 years of experience in dual enrollment programs at VA Community College in Virginia. It is important to recognize positionality and to reflect on how that may influence a power differential between the researcher and the participant (Hays & Singh, 2012). From the researcher’s first position at the College as a dual enrollment coordinator to the current one as the interim vice president for student affairs,

interaction with and attention to the college's dual enrollment program has been a constant. The researcher is now a senior administrator and member of the president's cabinet with a vested interest in the success of dual enrollment at the College. It is critical to reflect on and bracket this influence on the participants' responses. In qualitative research, it is not possible to separate our personal selves from our professional selves (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Since researchers observe, record, and interpret qualitative data from their own frames of reference, they must constantly evaluate why they selected the topics and methods and how these might relate to their personal interests (Hays & Singh, 2012). Specifically, the researcher recognizes a strong belief that participating in dual enrollment is a positive experience for high school students and both of her children were dual enrolled, one of them at VA Community College, and had positive experiences.

The race and age of the researcher presented a challenge and introduced a power dynamic to the study. The researcher attempted to recruit African American college students to conduct the interviews. Ultimately, these efforts introduced a scheduling challenge that could not be overcome. Therefore, the researcher, a middle-aged White female, conducted the interviews. The researcher's administrative position, coupled with her race and age, may have affected the way in which the participants responded to the interview questions, the extent to which they felt they could express negative opinions, and consequently the richness of the interview.

Subjectivity is what distinguishes qualitative from quantitative research (Hays & Singh, 2012). Subjectivity becomes a way to be involved closely with the research and a means to understand the phenomenology more deeply (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher made every effort to remain the naïve inquirer by continuously questioning assumptions and using participant

checks to ensure that interpretation of the data aligns with the lived experiences of the participants.

Credibility

Hays and Singh (2012) described the essence of qualitative validity as the truthfulness of the “findings and conclusions based on maximum opportunity to hear participant voices in a particular context” (p. 192). Field notes assisted in maintaining an accurate and thorough record of the data collection activities. Field notes served as an additional data source when taken during the interview process to supplement the recorded responses (Hays & Singh, 2012). This research includes both reflective and descriptive field notes. The descriptive field notes provide depictions of the participants in the research setting, their behaviors and demeanor. The reflective field notes were a means to capture subjective data, like impressions and ideas, during the research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Peer debriefing is another reflexive technique that provides an additional and important level of accountability. Peer debriefing is an activity that challenges the researcher to answer questions, look at alternatives, make relationships, and hear from a devil’s advocate perspective (Hays & Singh, 2012). Peer debriefing possesses the added benefit of providing emotional support to the researcher during the research process (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher used members of the dissertation committee for assistance with peer debriefing.

Ultimately, the accuracy of the student voices must be protected. Member checking is another strategy to increase trustworthiness in qualitative research (Hays & Singh, 2012). Member checking is an ongoing dialogue with participants to ensure their meaning and intent are accurately captured. Member checking occurs at different times during the research, during the interview itself when clarification is requested, when transcripts are provided to the participants

to review, and by providing the findings to the participants at the conclusion of the analysis (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Limitations

The study contains the potential for several limitations. First, while the participants were from a sample at a community college, it is still only one of 23 community colleges in Virginia. VACC is located in an economically stable area. There are several state and private colleges and universities in the service region, and the military has a large impact on the local economy. Other colleges in the community college system may be smaller, more rural, or larger and more urban, therefore results from this study are not transferable to the community college system as a whole.

Self-selection is another potential limitation. Until the requests for interviews had been sent out, it was not possible to know what the response would be. If only racial minority females responded, for example, that would have only given the female perspective. The potential for only the most engaged and self-confident students to opt to participate may skew results to that group. Additionally, the study may be limited by the students' willingness to respond honestly and participate in interviews that ask personal questions about their perceptions and beliefs.

Delimitations

Leedy and Ormrod (2016) identified delimitations as what the researcher does not intend to study. This study only examined African American community college students' perceptions about dual enrollment and not the totality of their educational experience. Research conducted by An (2015) investigated the importance of academic motivation and engagement and college performance. This research was more narrowly focused on the students' experiences that led them to the decision to dual enroll and not their perception of their own motivation.

Summary

Chapter Three reiterates the purpose of the research study, followed by a description of the qualitative nature of the design. The rationale for the selection of a phenomenological approach, the study of the lived experiences of the participants, is explored. The social constructivist paradigm is expanded. The sections outline the appropriateness of the methodology chosen to answer the research foci. The conceptual framework is reviewed and expanded upon from Chapter Two. Descriptions of the research setting and the participants are provided, along with an explanation of the sampling strategy. The strategy for data collection and analysis is discussed in detail, and the chapter concludes with information about credibility and study limitations.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Dual enrollment programs have emerged as a strategy to increase high school students' success in college as measured by higher GPAs, higher rates of enrolling in college, and higher rates of completion. These benefits have been observed and measured across racial minority lines and socio-economic status (An, 2011). In Virginia, the community college system provides a framework where all community colleges within the system have contractual relationships with the high schools in their service regions to provide dual enrollment at no cost to students (VA Plan for Dual Enrollment). Despite the availability of dual enrollment and lack of cost barriers, African American students lag considerably behind their White peers in taking advantage of dual enrollment programs in their schools. Community colleges, in particular, serve a mission of access and equity which is not being realized in Virginia dual enrollment programs.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of African American Community College students who had participated in dual enrollment while in high school. The foci of the study centered on two questions, what influenced the decision to participate and how the experience influenced decisions to attend college? Chapter Four provides an analysis of interviews with eleven community college students who completed at least one dual enrollment course with VA Community College while in high school and subsequently enrolled at VACC. The findings report on the students' opinions, impressions, doubts, attitudes, beliefs and feelings. The experiences the students shared provided the data to develop a richer understanding of what influenced their dual enrollment and college-going decisions. Additional information on the study participants and the process of theme development can be found in Appendices G and H.

Textural Description. The textural description provides the narrative description of what happened to the students in the study, and the structural description provides data on how dual enrollment was experienced by the students. The research sought to understand two questions in an exploration of what influences African American Community College students' decision to participate in dual enrollment while in high school, and how that experience influenced subsequent choices. The research explored two foci:

- 1) What influences African American high school students to decide to participate in a dual enrollment program in high school?
- 2) How does their experience in dual enrollment programs influence their college-going decision-making?

The themes developed from the interview data addressed these two questions. Table 5 shows how the interview blueprint supported the themes.

Table 5

<i>Theme Development from Interview Blueprint</i>		
Dual Enrollment Progression	RQ 1: Influences on DE Participation	RQ 2: Influences on College-going Decisions
Awareness of DE	Perceptions of Outside Influences on DE	
Interest in DE	Dual Enrollment Grades as Success Tool	
Action to Enroll	Perceptions of Dual Enrollment Registration Process	
Experience in Class		Expectancy of College-level Performance
Assessment of Experience		Expectancy of College-level Performance
Value of Experience		Value of College-going Experience

Research Question One: Influences on Decision to Participate in Dual Enrollment

The first research question sought to understand what influenced African American high school students to select a different path in their junior year than the typical high school course offerings. Selecting this path meant completing an online admission application, taking a placement test, and submitting a signed registration form. Since so many more White high school juniors were taking advantage of this opportunity, how were African American students influenced to make this choice? The themes are explored chronologically beginning with the students' first awareness of dual enrollment, which is followed by the understanding that weighted dual enrollment grades are a tool to increase overall GPA, which in turn leads to the actual college admission process. The themes culminate with how the experience ultimately influenced future college-going decisions. Throughout these phases of awareness, interest, and action, examples of inequity can be seen and heard in the students' experiences. Figure 3 represents the researcher's depiction of the students' evolving perceptions.



Figure 3. Evolution of students' perception of dual enrollment availability.

Perceptions of Outside Influences on Decision Making

While the study was mainly concerned with the influences that led to dual enrollment and then how dual enrollment influenced later behaviors, the reason those questions are important is because far fewer African American students than White students are participating in dual enrollment in Virginia. This interview question, where the students were asked to reflect on why they thought so few African American students participated at their schools, shed some light on why they think this is occurring. The eleven students offered two theses: one, dual enrollment is perceived as a program for White students, and two, African American students are not as aware of opportunities available to them.

Emma's example catches this first concept clearly:

First, I would say it was almost like a culture shock for me going to the dual enrollment classes, because I didn't really see a lot of people that looked like me.

Emma attended a high school that was 42% African American and, in her junior year, she also attended a Governor's School for Science and Technology. Demographic information is not available for the Governor's School, but Emma expressed that it was very different, going from her high school to a place where there was 'such a lack of diversity.'

The impact of others surrounding the student can have a profound impact on academic decision making. Students consider and commit to a series of decisions to either continue or terminate education, as well as the academic paths they pursue. Given the scope of factors considered in academic decisions, parents, relatives, counselors, friends, and other significant members of the students' sphere have input and influence on decisions as students navigate through these decisions. The students in the study reported varying degrees of support, information, and encouragement from their counselors. It was clear from the responses in totality

that the students did not have an awareness of dual enrollment in high school prior to their junior year. The students perceived a stark difference in the information they were being given about college preparation, such as scholarship opportunities and college application deadlines, when compared to what their White friends were receiving. Helen reported that she felt her high school counselor thought she wouldn't be successful, despite her good grades in high school: "She was like, 'You know it's gonna be very hard for you.' So, her suggestion with things was to kind of lay low and not take so many [advanced] classes." High school counselors are in an ideal spot to have a maximum impact on students' course choice in high school. The students' experiences bear that out. Andy's counselor pushed him hard into dual enrollment while Helen felt actively discouraged. As Fay stated, "If you know, you don't have like, your counselor, your mentor to like, motivate you and believe ... then you're not going to believe in yourself either."

Gwen, who attends a predominantly White high school but whose friends are mostly African American, shared that the perception of the group was that they would not be accepted into dual enrollment courses.

It's not really how I saw it talking to my friends 'cause I do have majority African American friends. They saw it as something that they didn't think that they would be accepted into, just because the school's predominantly White. And we had a very few select group in this little community of African Americans. Majority of the dual enrollment was White students versus Black students.

The students reported a range of responses from parents, including one who required a struggling student to dual enroll, and one who expressed pride that the student had sought a challenging path. Fay, an aspiring medical school student, was told by her parents to take every advantage offered her in order to save money.

My parents made it very clear like, freshman year, they're not going to be able to, you know, pay for it, 'cause you know, my mom was in college too. She was like, "So, any opportunity they give you, you need to take that." And I was like, "Okay ...", and plus I want to go to medical school, so as much free college I can get, I'm gonna take it. So that's a big reason why.

Andy had a tumultuous freshman and sophomore year in high school and his mother pushed and encouraged him to dual enroll. Although Andy had no interest in continuing in the content area of his dual enrollment experience, administration of justice, he credited it with putting him ahead of his peers, something that made him feel good about himself as a student:

Then my teacher and my counselor and my mom...had a parent/teacher conference thing. All my teachers were there actually, they were like, "If you don't get it together, you're going to be way behind, [more] than you already were." Then I had to go to summer school. When I took ... I had to take English and math in summer school. I was already a year behind in math than all my other friends. [My mom and counselor] pushed me. I caught up with [my friends] by the time we were to graduate. Then my counselor...was like, "Well, you don't want to be behind again so you should take dual enrollment. That way you can get ahead." It doesn't really feel good to be behind other people when you have that option to take it and you didn't take advantage of your option. They were pretty on my butt about doing dual enrollment.

At the complete other end of the spectrum is Helen, who had to actively overcome the guidance she received from her counselor.

'Cause I noticed my counselor wasn't giving me a lot. But if I talked to my white friends' counselors [they] were telling them everything, what schools to apply to early, all the little papers you can write for scholarships and everything. And I wasn't getting that.

Helen is an excellent illustration of the idea that dual enrollment is for White students, and also how the themes in the study manifested in her. She had excellent grades in high school but saw extra weight given to dual enrollment grades and the no-cost feature as a way to both improve her academic record and get a head start on college. At the same time, she felt that her counselor (Perceptions of Outside Influences) actively sought to dissuade her from dual enrollment, to the point that she and her father walked out of a meeting. It took Helen some time to recover from the comments of the counselor that her strong grades and affluent appearance would not go over well with her peers, and she pulled back academically for a time. She felt the need to push herself in order to be ready for college by taking courses she described as a lot of work (Expectancy of College-level Experience). Still, she lays the lack of equity in dual enrollment programs squarely at the feet of her counselor:

I honestly always think of my counselor. Just that conversation I had. 'Cause I wasn't fitting in very well and I didn't understand why. I went to the counselor with my parents and she was like, "You know, you guys make this much while most of them are section eight. She dresses very nice. Most of them dress in different clothing. She presents herself in a different way. She's very smart and that's good. She's getting awards and stuff but it's coming off as she's better than them." So, I will say at one point I felt so uncomfortable that I did try dumbing myself down. I didn't wanna be the person who raised their hand first in class. I didn't wanna be the person who was in dual enrollment. I was taking AP classes and then I didn't want to. I was pretending like I wasn't doing my

homework and going out. So, I definitely think the environment that we're in and especially people such as counselors in the position that they're in, I think they have a really big effect on what path we end up going on.

Social support from the individuals surrounding the students, including parents, teachers, counselors and peers, is a predictor of achievement goals, with peer support positively affecting mastery goals that include wanting to do well in school. The perception among the study participants' friends who did not participate in dual enrollment was that it was difficult and stressful. The comments that were made by friends alluded to the rigor, difficulty, and risks of dual enrollment actually hurting a high school GPA. Fay reported,

They're like, "It's going to take up your time, you're not going to be able to do all the fun stuff ..." and all that. "It's gonna be hard, it's gonna stress you out ..." And like, some of the upper classmen, you know, [were] like "Don't do it, because such and such, that's you know, dual enrollment and he's so hard on grades and it's going to sink your GPA."

In other instances, it was friends or classmates who recommended dual enrollment. A participant who was new to the school and had never heard of dual enrollment was encouraged by a math partner to look into it. According to Gwen,

My sophomore year I was in a Geometry class and one of the ladies that I was paired up with at a table, she talked about getting accepted to it. I asked her some questions and what not. She was like "Okay, you have to stay on top of your GPA, and you have to enroll in your junior year and make sure that you talk to your Advisor and what not."

Emma found support for dual enrollment from her peers:

My friends definitely supported me, even though I wasn't going to see them as much. I wouldn't say there was any negative feedback, because it seems that everyone just wanted me to do well.

It is clear from the research that the individuals in a student's sphere have profound influences on their actions and behaviors. This study found that the counselors in these students' spheres did not lay a foundation in grades nine and ten for a collegiate dual enrollment experience in grades eleven and twelve. For Helen, if it were not for White friends, she would have missed out on a lot of things:

Yeah, there were a lot of things I didn't know about advanced diplomas. I wasn't aware of AP classes, AP testing. I wasn't aware of so much that was offered. It was being around my white friends and hearing all that like, "Oh, well I can do that."

Ian reported that dual enrollment opportunities were now widely shared or promoted in his school:

Another thing was that the dual enrollment program, it wasn't really I guess announced throughout the schools. It seemed like it was handled with serious discretion. I'm glad I heard about it and I'm lucky that I did, but I think it's now that they open[ed] it up to more schools instead of just [HS X]. With them doing that, I think that there might be growth and [an] equal amount of participants in the dual enrollment.

Dual enrollment Course Grades as Tools for Success

Once the students became aware that dual enrollment was an option in their school, they entered the interest phase. They learned about the program and began to form opinions about it. They wondered if there would be people in dual enrollment classes who looked like them. They were told it would be very challenging and considered that factor. They acknowledged the

perception that dual enrollment was something only White students are “accepted into,” as Gwen believed. Despite these concerns, the students grasped a new concept about dual enrollment: weighted GPA. There is voluminous research that shows the impact of dual enrollment participation on college grades, but little to be found on its impact on high school grades. The idea that students might actually use dual enrollment as a mechanism to raise their GPA is not found in the literature. More than half of the students in the study mentioned the benefit of the weighted GPA on their high school grades, but they were seeking the benefit for different reasons. In four cases, the students had performed poorly academically early in their high school career and sought to repair their GPA with weighted dual enrollment classes. Ben had attended high school in a foreign country, and when he transferred to the new school, his grades and credits didn’t count the same as they had in the previous high school. Ben said,

I decided to take dual enrollment classes mainly because I wanted to boost my GPA, because my GPA is different over here because when they transfer[red] my credits it’s like 0.5, so it wasn’t as much as I wanted it to be. So, I took dual enrollment classes.

Gwen went through a time in her sophomore year where she was struggling. There were deaths in her family, and she was sick, causing her to miss a lot of school. Her GPA “plummeted” during that time and she was worried that the damage to her GPA would keep her from being accepted to college. She began to consider alternatives to college, like the military or straight into the workforce. Ian saw it as a way to test the waters: “So I was like okay, maybe I can do dual enrollment, get my GPA up, get some credits under my belt and kind of ease my way into college.”

For other participants, dual enrollment was a mechanism to bolster an already strong academic record. Emma and Fay both used the same term to describe it: a “GPA boost.”

The literature shows that students who participate in dual enrollment programs have higher GPAs than non-participants when they matriculate to college. The use of dual enrollment as a tool, kind of a reset button to improve a damaged GPA, has not been documented. Some of the students who elected to take this opportunity were not necessarily college-bound at that point in their educations and not overly confident in their abilities as students thus far. Not only were they able to remediate some of the damage done by either bad behavior, lack of effort, or things outside their control, but their academic confidence received a boost as well.

Perceptions of the Challenges Faced Upon Deciding to Dual Enroll

Armed with new knowledge and interest, the students had to take a specific set of actions to become college students while still in high school. Although all but one of the research participants remembered pieces of the dual enrollment registration process, it was not a distinct experience for any of them. In order to dual enroll, the students had to complete an online application and receive their student ID and login credentials to the Student Information System (SIS). With those credentials, they were required to take a placement test or submit SAT/ACT scores. The placement test, called the Virginia Placement Test (VPT), is an adaptive test instrument that is untimed. It has two sections, reading/writing and mathematics. The test can take as long as four hours. For the math section in particular, the better the students perform in terms of correct responses, the longer the test takes as it continues to provide questions to increasingly advanced mathematics. A student can ultimately test out of calculus but would spend a few hours in the effort. Finally, the student must take a registration form home, have it signed by a parent (parental permission is a requirement of the VA Plan for Dual Enrollment) and return it to their teacher. The admission application and registration form elicited no negative responses from the students. From their replies, it appeared that forms and parental signatures are

a common occurrence, and the online application did not pose any significant problems. None of the students reported that these parts of the registration process were barriers, or that it was particularly difficult.

The placement test garnered different reviews. Andy expressed some anxiety over the placement test and reported that others he knew who had been considering dual enrollment decided not to dual enroll at that point in the process. Helen had this to say about the placement test:

I remember the whole class was like, "We have to take a placement test?" So I think that kind of messed with us a little bit. I'm not gonna lie, in the back of my head [I] was like, "Oh, what kind of placement test? Is it something I'm gonna easily pass? Or do I need to study for this?" So that I think wigged me out a little bit.

Helen articulated the high stakes involved in placement testing. Students are generally uninformed about the placement test and unsure about what the test entails. They are also tested frequently in high school, so opting for another test that is not required might be a deciding factor for many students.

A normal part of being a high school student is filling out forms and taking tests. Students frequently need to get forms signed for parental permission. These pieces of the dual enrollment registration process do not appear to present any challenges. The students' reactions to placement testing, however, highlight one potentially significant barrier for some students considering dual enrolling in college level classes. The Virginia Community College system has recognized the high stakes nature of placement testing and has implemented a policy of placement based on multiple measures, including high school GPA and highest level of math taken. However, these measures are not available to non-high school graduates. Given the

reactions of the study participants, the VPT may be a factor in students' decisions not to pursue dual enrollment.

Research Question Two: Influence of Dual Enrollment on College-going Decisions

The research sought to gain insight into how African American community college students perceived the influence of dual enrollment in their decision to enroll in college after high school. There is a strong, robust body of evidence showing that dual enrollment participation in high school confers a host of benefits to students upon matriculating to college, therefore increasing the number of all students, and African American students in particular, and spreads these benefits across student populations, increasing student success. The themes that emerged from research question two included how the students perceived the reality of the dual enrollment experience compared to their expectations and culminated in how they perceived the value of the college-going experience. Table 6 gives examples of expectancy beliefs and value statements.

Table 6

Examples of Expectancy Beliefs and Value Statements

Participant	Expectancy Beliefs	Value Statements
Andy	"It's just more work"	"...do dual enrollment because it will get you ahead."
Ben	"I did brace myself for them being all about late night hours."	"Ultimately these courses taught me that I needed to be more organized."
Carly	"I was reluctant taking a math dual enrollment class."	"...being able to take a dual enrollment class prepared me for the classes here."
Diane	"Yeah, I would say it helped my confidence."	"Okay, I heard free and it counts twice."
Emma	"Yeah, I knew it was going to be tough, but I didn't know"	"I liked the benefit of getting those college credits."

	how tough it was going to be.”	
Fay	“...in dual enrollment it kind of like, put my foot in the door.”	“...getting experience of what college is going to be like.”
Gwen	“So, I was like okay, maybe I can do dual enrollment.”	“It was definitely like a shock.”
Helen	“I just wanted to start pushing myself.”	“Didn't wanna go straight into William and Mary ... just to save money.”
Ian	“I didn't expect it to be as much as it was for such an intense course.”	“Financially, I thought it would be cheaper.”
Kate	“[Being] in college and still in high school, you could tell the difference.”	“I thought well, if I took a college class then maybe it'll help me understand what college is really gonna be like.”

Expectancy of College-Level Performance

The fact that one of the students actually used the word ‘rigorous’ was indicative of the students’ overall experiences, particularly the student who failed a math course. When asked about prior expectations of the dual enrollment course, Emma shared this:

I thought they would be rigorous, because that's what I've heard, that's what I've always heard. I kind of expected it. I thought it would be a smaller classroom setting. I'm not sure why. I guess because I didn't know a lot of people who were going to take those dual enrollment courses I was in. Yeah, I knew it was going to be tough, but I didn't know how tough it was going to be.

From Fay’s perspective,

I thought they were going to be like really hard ... studying like two, three hours a day just on that, then like ... three, four hours of homework ... every night on that. So, it was

kind of like, worrying me. ‘Cause like, in the beginning I wasn't really good at scheduling my time and stuff.

Ian explained the challenge this way:

I didn't expect it to be as much, or at least the English. I didn't expect it to be as much as it was for such an intense course in such little time because before, although I was taking some difficult classes, it wasn't much where I was stressing out and juggling each and every little thing.

The grades the students reported receiving in their courses support an experience that was academically challenging; see Table 7.

Table 7

Students Self-Reported Courses Completed and Self-Reported Grades Received

Participant	Self-Reported Course(s)	Self-Reported Grade(s)
Andy	Administration of Justice 100 and 105	Cs
Ben	Political Science	C
Carly	History 111 and 112	As
Diane	College Algebra and English 111	F and C
Emma	History 111 and 112, English 111 and 112	Bs
Fay	Math, Biology and Mechanical Engineering	As and Bs
Gwen	English 111 and 112	Bs
Helen	English 111	A
Ian	English 111 and 112	Bs
Julia	Unsure, perhaps Early Childhood	Unknown
Kate	Administration of Justice 100 and 105	As

The students' grades ranged from As to an F, with a group average of 2.95. Interestingly, Diane, with her unimpressive grades, was the most passionate about how dual enrollment had changed

her future educational plans. Kate, whose high school dual enrollment courses required American Psychological Association (APA) format rather than Modern Language Association (MLA) format, felt better prepared than her peers:

[Dual enrollment] definitely helped a lot 'cause you just sort of like ... It was APA stuff whereas in high school it's MLA so as soon as I started [at VACC] and the classes were APA, I was like, "Oh, well I already did some of those." Even if I don't remember it completely, it kind of comes back to you as you look at it, so it was really ... it was a lot ... it made me feel a lot better about being able to take all those classes that required all that same kind of criteria.

Despite concerns about dual enrollment quality among external stakeholders, the study participants reported expecting the courses to be challenging. They heard this from their friends, peers, and counselors. The fact that the courses were weighted, like AP courses, lent additional strength to this belief. When that proved to be true, and the students were able to rise to the academic challenge, it made them feel good about themselves. Andy said, "I'm already ahead of most first-time students here. It makes me feel good."

During the interviews, the students reflected on how they felt about themselves academically as they experienced the dual enrollment course. Fay expressed:

...it was really kind of like, a little bit stressful. But I feel like once I got, you know, after a couple [of] weeks of finding like in the rhythm of it ... I would go to after-school sessions, you know, with the teacher tutoring—I was doing anything I possibly could ... 'cause I didn't wanna, you know, get laid down when it comes test time and do really bad ...It wasn't as bad as I expected it to be. I feel like, at first I was like, oh this is really bad, but once you start getting like ... in the flow of how the teacher grades, how the

assignments go ... when you should start prepping for your time, it's just a lot easier. It wasn't as stressful. I feel like the first two, three weeks, you're feeling stressed. And after that, it was just kind of ... a breeze to me.

Kate keenly felt that she was a college student at the time of her dual enrollment, and it resonated strongly with her: “you're not just high school student. You're also a college student.” And further: “that means that college isn't gonna be so hard if I'm already doing it right now while I'm still in high school.”

The students in the study varied in their academic successes at the point of dual enrolling, and their grades in the courses bore that out: a range of As to an F. And yet, none of them concluded that they could not do college-level work. Ben and Emma did decide to take fewer dual enrollment classes after the initial experience, but they did not interpret the difficulty as an inability to perform at that level. Even Fay, who demonstrably did not perform at a collegiate level in one course, still had a complete change of attitude about her abilities as a student. If the students had all received A grades, that would not have been surprising, but feeling better when earning Cs or an F is a surprising finding. It was the academic experience, challenges and all, that made the students adjust their perceptions about their own academic abilities. Carly put it like this:

Yes. I felt ready for the classes here. I thought the [dual enrollment courses] were extremely hard. I was reluctant at first. I don't know if I would be able to take a class like this because of the requirements. But afterwards I was encouraging other students. It's really beneficial.

Value of College-going Experiences

The experience of navigating outside influences when making dual enrollment choices, persisting through a high-stakes testing requirement, and a willingness to pursue what is expected to be a difficult college-level course formed the first portion of the dual enrollment experience. As the course(s) unfold, the reality of the rigor of the work is discovered and the students' perceptions of their academic abilities evolve as they reassess their academic abilities and readiness for college in a positive new light. Although all but one student in the study expressed some level of post-secondary planning, only two had specific colleges in mind. Despite the level or depth of the planning, the students reported only positive influences of dual enrollment on their ultimate decision to continue their education and matriculate to VACC.

The concern of this study is that fewer African American students are taking advantage of dual enrollment in Virginia and therefore not receiving its benefits, so the responses and insights of the students who were not planning on college after high school were of particular interest. The students in the study entered high school with differing post-high school plans. Student participants fell into two categories about why they elected to participate in dual enrollment courses. There was a group of students who were already planning on attending college after high school, and a second group who were unsure about or without post-high school plans. The seven students who stated they intended to attend college after high school did so. More interestingly, the four students with unformed or no plans also attended college after high school. Thirty-six percent of the sample attended college as a result of their dual enrollment experience, which has significant implications for increasing college-going patterns among students with few or no plans after high school.

Table 8

Post-High School Plans

Post-high school plans	Number of students expressing this theme	%age of students
Definitely planning on attending college after high school	7	64
Undecided about attending college after high school	2	18
Not planning on attending college after high school	2	18

Diane expressed her post-high school plans this way:

Pretty much in my perfect world, at that time, was to get out [of high school] and do nothing, be free. Of course, that was completely ridiculous, but at that moment, that's what I felt like was going to be my paradise. I didn't have any plans.

After completing two dual enrollment courses and even failing one, her feelings reflected a considerably different perspective. She recounts a time when she was involved in a group project that involved a group presentation. The students had to dress up for the assignment and a group grade was assigned. Diane forgot about the presentation and showed up unprepared. Her group was angry at her, and she realized she had let them down. Prior to this class, she recounted, she wouldn't have cared. But this class mattered to her, she was doing well otherwise, and the disappointment of her peers really stung. She believed the course helped her mature as a student, accepting how her actions affected her group. By the time she was nearing graduation, she reports:

I was like, "I want to go to college." At that point I was like, "Yeah, I definitely need to go to college. What am I going to do now that I'm done with high school? I can't just sit around and do nothing." So I was just like I need to go to college and do something. At that point, I had already goofed all my high school years, so I was just like, "What am I

going to do?" Well, for one, I was taking college credit, so I was like why would you throw that away? I feel like I just matured more, and I just started to see things differently [from] how I had been seeing them. Also, it had gotten kind of better for me in my senior year, so my judgment wasn't as clouded as it had been previously. Yeah, dual enrollment did have an impact.

Gwen was also unsure about post-high school plans, despite having a sibling away at a four-year college.

I wasn't sure about college and I didn't know if I wanted to pick up a trade, go into the military or do college, cause at that time my GPA plummeted. There were deaths in my family. I missed a bunch of school. So, I was like okay, maybe I can do dual enrollment, get my GPA up, get some credits under my belt and kind of ease my way into college, instead of just going full force ... and I'm happy that I did that.

Despite a plan and intent to attend college after high school, the participants who entered high school on a college-bound track attributed dual enrollment with keeping them on track with their plans. Carly puts it this way:

I always wanted to go to college afterwards. I wanted to get my [associate's] degree. It has impacted me because being able to take a dual enrollment class prepared me for the classes here at [VA Community College].

Seven out of eleven students who self-selected for the study were firm in their post-high school plans to attend college. Two of them had planned to attend a four-year institution, but finances and learning about transfer programs at the community college changed their paths. Two of the students entered high school with no plans of attending college after graduation. For those who did not plan to attend college, dual enrollment played an important role in changing

their intentions. Another participant, Gwen, had a sister in college when she was in high school. She initially thought the four-year world had a lot to offer: “And the way she made it sound, this exciting place, new adventures, new experiences, meeting new people, and it just sounded really interesting. It's a new chapter in your life; you can go out, be independent.” But at the same time,

Mostly with the mindset that I wasn't ready for college, and I wanted to experience what it would be like just to see if I could actually go through with it or if I was going to give up and say, “I'm just going to join the military.” I wanted to experience a little bit before I made my decision on what I decided...

Gwen had a view into college life that her sister provided, yet she expressed doubts that she would stick with college if she tried. Even the idea of being out on her own in college, which she described as a “candy shop,” didn't overcome her belief that she wasn't ready. She believed that dual enrollment would be a way of testing herself while she still had options to fall back on:

That pushed me more toward doing the college aspect of it. Seeing that I can do this, my sister said all this stuff, it sounds interesting to me, let me just try it out and if it doesn't work, at least I have two other things to fall back on.

This trying-out concept that Gwen shared is frequently found in the literature and describes how dual enrollment gives students the opportunity to practice the role of a community college student. College is different than high school, with different expectations and different norms. There is a range of skills, behaviors, and abilities that students need to develop to become successful. As the students in the study who were less sure about their strength in these areas became more so, their postsecondary plans became more possible for them. Dual enrollment is a practice field that gives students the opportunity to discover that they have what it takes to be a successful college student.

Dual enrollment's value arose from the idea that it gave the students a head start on college, saved them money, and would help them graduate sooner. Many dual enrollment promotional materials tout the idea of getting a head start on college. Dual enrollment was developed in Virginia to meet a need for a program that would benefit the large population of students who were considered average, who might consider postsecondary education but not be likely to pursue a bachelor's degree. Dual enrollment with a community college was seen as a way to allow them to get a head start on their college career. This head start notion took root in the research participants, who all felt that these courses were the start of their college experience. For Andy,

Yeah. It sounds like a positive thing because it gives you a head start on college. That way you don't have to put so much time into [college], and then that way you don't get in debt. It gives me a chance to get out earlier than the others since I'm already ahead. I'm already ahead of most first-time students here.

Andy continued,

On top of that, most students when they're going through college, they apply for student loans and then after they graduate, they end up getting a job so that they can pay off those loans. So they're not really breaking even. This is also a head start because if you do apply for student loans, you don't have to apply for as much now being that you got 10 to 13 credits taken out.

Emma saw the whole experience as a way to save time and money and to get some general education courses out of the way: "...the fact that it helped save money as well. It helped me get past some of those general education classes."

Perceptions of Equity in Dual Enrollment

Reflecting on the students' honest and thoughtful responses to questions about their dual enrollment experience, it is not surprising that far fewer African American students participate in dual enrollment than White students. It is difficult to take advantage of opportunities that are unknown and to overcome feelings that students in this program don't look like you. School counselors are not intentionally withholding dual enrollment information from students, but they are likely unaware of the significant benefits that accrue to students, academically gifted or not, when they participate in a rigorous academic experience. At this point in the research, it seemed natural to ask for some counselor perspective.

The counselors I spoke with work in the schools in the college's service region. They are well-known to the researcher and interested in the study. They reported believing that the students and their families have very positive perceptions regarding dual enrollment. Families have remarked to them, in some fashion or another, about the financial benefits, the academic challenge, and/or the ability for their student to get a head start on college credits. One counselor described their experience with GearUP, where they purposefully targeted the students "in the middle ground." These students had done well academically but hadn't sought out AP or honors courses. The counselors discovered that many of the students didn't realize they had the aptitude to complete the work successfully. Unlike the "high fliers," parents weren't pressing for them to try more challenging courses, and at times neither were the counselors. If the counselors did mention trying something at a higher level, the students didn't trust themselves to do well. After the original cohort did perform well, word spread among the circles of friends and families began to inquire about dual enrollment more often. This was echoed by the experience of the study participants.

The counselors recognized their importance in these decisions, and Jennifer put it this way:

If the counselors aren't pushing you to try to stretch yourself, then something like DE may slip away swiftly. I have had several students come to me well after the fact, trying to get into DE, stating they didn't realize how important it was until we'd spoken, or they had chatted with friends. When I speak to their parents or guardians about the subject, they don't always understand the impact of their child's participation because they aren't familiar with the college process. I can think of some of these families who later came to me with gratitude because their child was ahead, or they were able to save money in the long run.

Her observations are completely in line with the themes that the students presented.

The counselors also shared some other reasons why dual enrollment participation is not always promoted to students:

A personal thought/theory for me is that we need to educate our educators and counselors more thoroughly as to what DE is and how it can be beneficial to families. Some counselors are very "married" to AP and don't feel that DE is a solid option for college-bound students. As such, they don't push DE as a course option when meeting with students for scheduling. In other cases, counselors have indicated that they don't fully understand the scope of DE and thus are reluctant to suggest it as an option, because they don't feel they can answer nuts and bolts questions. I know of another pocket who don't mention DE to students because they don't think the credits will be accepted at top schools, so they don't even mention DE to students/families who may be thinking of

schools like UVA. When you add up the number of counselors who have hesitation as to DE, we are missing the middle range AND high-fliers who could potentially benefit.

Reflecting on the conversations with the counselors, I was reminded of the “soft bigotry of low expectations” first mentioned by George W. Bush in 2003 (Bush, 2003, para 24). It is possible that African American students were not more broadly aware of dual enrollment because of this unintentional but harmful bias. Without additional research, it is not possible to know the extent to which this may be factor, but it is clear that counselors play a critical role in students’ choices. Therefore, the extent to which they believe in dual enrollment as a student success strategy for all students, but especially racial minorities and students with average academic records, impacts how many students may ultimately reap dual enrollment benefits.

Structural Description

The students in the study experienced dual enrollment in their junior or senior years of high school. The students learned about dual enrollment from various sources: peers, teachers and counselors. They all executed the college-going processes in order to be enrolled, despite concerns about the placement test. Each one completed the online common college application and received a student ID number. The students used the ID number when logging in to the placement testing system. The students tested at various times in their high school career, some at the end of the 10th grade in preparation for junior year eligibility, others in the semester the course began.

The dual enrollment experience for the students took place within the walls of their high school, with instruction being delivered by qualified high school teachers. The other students in the dual enrollment class had all completed the same process and all were receiving college credit. The course followed the high school academic calendar, so it was typically longer than a

16-week college semester. The experience did not involve navigating the college campus at any time. Upon completing the course, the students had grades on VA Community College transcripts.

Essence

In the spring of 2019, 69 students were invited to participate in dual enrollment research at a suburban community college in Virginia. Each student shared the experience of having completed at least one college course while still in high school. Sixteen students responded positively to the initial email and eleven were interviewed. The students were both male and female, had attended a regional high school, and had been attending VA community college for as many as eight semesters.

The students appeared enthusiastic about participating in dual enrollment research, as indicated by the response emails from several of them with exclamation points that they would like to participate. Their interest was keen enough to survive several attempts at scheduling, with only one participant who stopped responding after two attempts to schedule had been unsuccessful. The students went to unexpected lengths to attend the interviews. Two students primarily take courses at a different campus than where the interviews were being conducted. It is a 45-minute drive between campuses, which demonstrated a certain enthusiasm to be interviewed.

With the exception of Julia, the students had a comprehensive grasp of dual enrollment. Julia was the only one in the sample who was unsure about what course she had taken for college credit and did not remember any part of the dual enrollment registration process. Most of her understanding about dual enrollment seemed to stem from her sister, who was part of an Early

College program. The other ten students were able to state definitively what courses they had taken and how they had become enrolled in them.

For the students in the study, dual enrollment conferred benefits to them whether in boosting their GPA, giving them a head start on college, or giving them a collegiate experience in high school that increased their academic confidence. Five students were a semester or two from graduation and had definitive transfer plans. They articulated specific actions that they had taken or planned to take to complete at the community college and transfer to a four-year institution.

High school counselors played a pivotal role. While the students expressed a familiarity with AP courses, dual enrollment was an option they discovered by happenstance rather than a standardized presentation of course offerings for juniors and seniors. The students in the study entered high school with varying degrees of post-secondary planning, from zero to a highly selective public institution. Consequently, their reactions to their dual enrollment experience covered the spectrum, from completely changing their minds about college after high school to playing a supporting role in a larger, previously formed plan. Despite all students reporting on the challenges of their dual enrollment courses, and the disastrous grade that one received, the difficulty did not dissuade any of them from pursuing higher education. Rather, it served as a confidence-builder for those who perceived their academic skills as weak. The students in the study, with the exception of Julia, recounted dual enrollment as a positive experience that they felt fortunate to have discovered. While they expressed an opinion that dual enrollment was more for White students, they didn't say they experienced any negative reactions from the White students in the classes. Kate summed up the opinions of the students:

Just that it was a really good experience to be able to do the dual enrollment and then that's what really influenced me to become enrolled at William and Mary, as well, because I would recommend it for anybody who wants to ... maybe even they don't know if college is their thing. 'Cause I know a lot of kids ... a lot of people that I went to high school with, you would hear them say, "Oh well, I don't know if I'm going to go to college 'cause I don't know how it's gonna be like"—well, that's like a leg up and it was just ... I think it's a really good thing for someone who just wants to know if this is something that's gonna work for me.

Summary

The qualitative research study explored the lived experiences, opinions, and perceptions of eleven African American Community College students who participated in dual enrollment at Virginia Community College while in high school and subsequently matriculated to the community college. Using the simplified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, five overarching themes were identified.

Once the students became aware of dual enrollment as an option, they displayed a keen interest in the benefits of the weighted GPA despite receiving a consistent message from peers about the academic rigor of the courses. The more they learned, the more they expressed thoughts about “getting a leg up” (Kate), “put [ting] a foot in the door” (Fay), and “just try[ing] it out” (Gwen). College courses in high school represented a safe space for these students to practice college and they were willing to undertake a set of specific, and sometimes uncomfortable, steps to participate. These findings indicate that increasing awareness could have a significant impact on increasing the number of African American students who participate in dual enrollment. These findings also give the concepts to share with students when raising

awareness: dual enrollment provides a GPA boost, gives you a leg up on college, and saves time and money. The findings also highlight a potential barrier in the form of the placement test. This is not insurmountable but certainly requires more information to be provided to the students about the test itself and how it is used. As the Virginia Community College system continues to use research to solve problems like proper course placement, another opportunity arises in how to use similar means to place dual enrollment students, negating the need for the long, frightening VPT.

The students' descriptions of the college-level coursework portray a challenging academic environment that put stresses on them, caused them to learn new ways to manage themselves, and led two of them to attempt fewer at a time in their senior year. They didn't feel that there was a risk associated with this college practice, which confirmed the strong students' opinions about their academic abilities and boosted the opinions of the less-confident students. They clearly found the experience valuable in terms of saving them money and earning college credits while in high school. The experience supported the plans of the college-going group and changed the plans of the undecided/non-college-going group. In all, dual enrollment for these students added an influential element to their secondary career, one that taught them college survival skills and improved their confidence.

The students shared reflections on why they believe fewer African American students participate in dual enrollment, and these were woven throughout the findings from the research questions. The students reported a feeling that dual enrollment is more for White students, and that African American students are not given the same information as White students about the different options available to them in high school. One of the school counselors who shared a belief noted that her peers have complicated and uninformed opinions about dual enrollment and,

for them, awareness is also a problem. In Chapter Five, these findings are discussed, along with implications for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Chapter Five presents a summary of the research study and the conclusions drawn from data discussed in Chapter Four. It provides the relationships between this study and the literature and the unanticipated outcomes of the study. The implications for action and recommendations for future research are discussed in the final sections.

Summary of the Study

Dual enrollment is a program that provides collegiate academic experiences to high school students, and those experiences have been shown to benefit students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status. The growth of dual enrollment, both nationally and in Virginia, provides increased opportunities for students to participate at more schools and take a wider range of courses. And yet the racial makeup of dual enrollment programs in Virginia is disproportionately White, highlighting an equity gap for African American students that is denying them the accompanying benefits of college course completion in high school.

The purpose of this study was to examine what influenced African American students' choice to participate in dual enrollment programs at a large, suburban community college in Virginia. Despite the expansion of dual enrollment, and the research that indicates it contributes to positive student outcomes for students across race and socioeconomic status, the low participation rate among African American students means these benefits are not being afforded to this population of students (An, 2013).

While much research exists that shows the positive effects of dual enrollment on student success (Giani et al., 2014; Karp & Bork, 2014), less is known about the actual experiences of

underrepresented groups and the elements that influence their decisions to participate. This phenomenological study set out to understand what influenced African American community college students to participate in dual enrollment while in high school and subsequently enroll at a large, suburban community college in Virginia.

The research focused on two areas: what influenced the decision to participate and how the experience influenced decisions to go to college. A qualitative approach was selected because the researcher was primarily interested in the *how* and *what* of the problem. How were students experiencing dual enrollment and high school and what role was it playing in their college-going decision making? A phenomenological approach was appropriate to explore these questions. The goal of the study was to understand experiences and perceptions; therefore, interview data was selected as the most appropriate means of data collection. Through inductive and recursive analysis, the researcher moved between the data and reflection upon the data and its findings.

Creswell's (2013) version of Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was used to analyze the interview data. At the onset, and throughout the data analysis process, the researcher engaged in bracketing in an effort to prevent personal biases and opinions from interfering with capturing the participants' experiences. From the initial review of transcribed interviews, 384 significant statements were identified. These were further analyzed, synthesized and ultimately grouped into five themes. The themes described what the students experienced and how they experienced it.

Summary of Research Findings

In this study, eleven African American community college students who had a common experience of participating in dual enrollment in high school shared their opinions, impressions, doubts, attitudes, beliefs and feelings about that experience with the researcher. The students

graduated from high school between 2016 and 2018 and were enrolled at VA Community College in the spring of 2019. The original population of students meeting the criteria was 69 students. Sixteen students responded to the initial email, and ultimately eleven students were interviewed. Analyzing the interview data led to the identification of five themes, three that speak to the first research focus and two that speak to the second. At each phase of the students' experiences, a theme emerged that provided a revealing look into the experiences of the eleven study participants.

The first research question asked what influenced African American high school students to participate in this program. The first three related themes form the pre-dual enrollment experience and take the students from new awareness of a new program in which they might participate. They develop interest when they discover how that participation might benefit them. Finally, they take action and navigate the steps required to become admitted to a community college and enrolled in a college course. The first theme experienced by the students was their perceptions of the outside influences on their choice to dual enroll. This involved how they learned about dual enrollment, and from whom. The second theme centered around how the students interpreted dual enrollment, with its weighted GPA, as a tool for student success. This was a strategic move on the students' part to improve their high school GPA. The third theme emerged after the decision to dual enroll had been made, and what the students had to do, in terms of steps to enrollment, and how they perceived those steps.

The second research question asked how the dual enrollment experience influenced their college-going choices. The corresponding themes evolved over the time the students were enrolled in the dual enrollment courses and began with an exploration of what the students expected the academic experience to be like compared to what it was actually like. With the

reality of the experience in mind, the students' perceptions of their expectancy of the college-level experience changed over time. Reflecting on their experience, a final theme surfaces: the idea that dual enrollment is a valuable experience that benefits students in many ways. Besides providing a GPA boost, it can ultimately decrease time to degree, thereby saving the students money in the long run. The second set of themes are interrelated and take the students through the experience of how their expectations met their reality, how their academic abilities proved out over the span of the course and how the dual enrollment experience provided value to them in college-going decisions.

Finally, to address the central concern of the study, the students were asked to share their thoughts about why there is such inequity in the participation rates for African American students in dual enrollment programs in Virginia. The students described an experience that was fraught with chance. Hearing from a friend, hearing from a counselor, and attending an assembly were the mechanisms of awareness for these students. Encouragement to participate ran the gamut from what felt like an intervention for Andy to what felt like discrimination for Helen. Dual enrollment looked like it was for White students. It felt like it was something they might not be accepted into. It wasn't offered as a matter of course when selecting junior and senior courses. As students in high schools that all had dual enrollment programs for juniors and seniors, these students all had equal access. What they did not have was equity.

Findings Related to the Literature

The first emergent theme in the study involved the students' perceptions of outside influences on their decisions and choices. Workman (2015) identified a gap in the literature regarding parental influence on undecided students. Seven of the students in the study had defined postsecondary plans; the remaining four were undecided, and they were not receiving

assistance from parents in making post-secondary decisions. All of the students in the study appeared to have positive relationships with parents and felt supported by them. An interesting result from the interviews, however, was that the parents were unaware of dual enrollment until their students talked to them about it. Andy was told to ‘take advantage of opportunities’ and Carly’s parents were proud of her, but none of the students reported *learning* about dual enrollment from their parents. The students learned about dual enrollment from counselors, teachers and peers, and then were encouraged by or received positive feedback from their parents for considering it. This suggests that, despite the spread of dual enrollment in high schools nationally and in Virginia, it is not a well-known option for African American parents.

As increasing numbers of students arrived on college campuses unprepared for college level work (Gabriel, 2016; Rodriguez, Bowden, Belfield, & Scott-Clayton, 2015), community colleges began using placement instruments to assess students’ readiness. There has been debate about the usefulness of such an exercise (Rodriguez et al., 2015; Scott-Clayton, Crosta & Belfield, 2014), particularly when many studies report that high school GPA is the single best predictor of college success (Scott-Clayton et al., 2012). The Virginia Community College System has acknowledged the challenges of properly placing students and uses multiple measures, including grades in math and English and SAT, ACT and GED scores (VCCS, 2019c). Students who have graduated from high school within the last five years may use any combination of these scores for placement (VCCS, 2109c)

These measures are not available to non-high school graduates; therefore, the placement test still poses a potential barrier to students. American students are tested a lot. Research suggests that for African American students, the high-stakes testing movement that began in the 1980s and exists in the current form of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 has actually

harmed them because, although the Act was envisioned as a multifaceted approach, in the end its main objective is producing high test scores (Thompson & Allen, 2012). In the years since its passage, the unintended consequence of high-stakes testing in high schools has harmed African American students by not improving their test scores and dropout rates, punitive discipline policies that push students into the prison pipeline, increased student apathy, and an effort on the part of schools to show high scores without any real regard for student learning (Thompson & Allen, 2012).

The third theme, perceiving challenges to becoming enrolled, highlighted placement testing as a potential barrier to dual enrollment. The process, online admission application and signed paper registration form, appeared to meld into the high school expectation of paperwork and parental permission. When asked about registering for dual enrollment courses, several of the participants had to take a minute to think back to what was involved. Andy felt that the paperwork was redundant, but not problematic. Other responses were neutral, and these two processes posed no challenges and did not impact dual enrollment decision making. The placement test, however, caused stressful reactions in some of the students.

Andy reported that, upon hearing about the placement test, several peers elected not to pursue dual enrollment. Diane was motivated by the need to catch up after a period of lackluster performance and was willing to proceed with placement testing. Helen was 'wiggled out' by the notion of placement testing and reported wondering if she would pass and if she should study for it. Further, she mentioned that she was not alone in this concern: "I remember the whole class was like, we have to take a placement test?"

Requiring an additional test for dual enrollment, one that is adaptive in nature and can last upwards of three hours, could conceivably tip the scales away from dual enrollment for

many students, especially for those feeling apathetic or unprepared, or lacking academic confidence.

The literature describes increasing concern about the quality and rigor of high school dual enrollment programs (Taylor, 2015). The Joint Legislative Audit Report in Virginia (JLARC, 2018) highlighted several key points directed at improving the quality of dual enrollment in the Commonwealth. The Virginia Community College System recently adopted wholesale the standards espoused by the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (VCCS, 2019d). The NACEP standards require that faculty meet the same qualifications as on-campus faculty, that the curriculum reflect the same learning objectives and content, that students meet the same standards as on-campus college students, and that there are assessments and evaluations in place (NACEP, 2019). This is part of the state's continuing efforts to ensure the quality of its dual enrollment programs.

The National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, founded in 1997, was established out of concerns over the quality of college courses taught by high school teachers on high school campuses (NACEP, 2019). In 2002, the organization adopted national standards with measurable criteria in five categories that mark the quality of dual enrollment programs: curriculum, faculty, students, assessment, and evaluation. The organization has become the national forum and only national standard for dual enrollment programs and has accredited 107 programs, including 69 two-year public colleges, 30 four-year public universities, and eight private four-year colleges and universities (NACEP, 2019).

Theme four explored the students' expectations of their dual enrollment experience. "Rigor" is a term used frequently by higher education practitioners when discussing the intellectual challenges of instruction (Glossary of Education Reform, 2016). It was a surprise to

hear one of the students use the term: “I thought they would be rigorous, because that's what I've heard, that's what I've always heard” (Emma). For these students, their expectation met their reality. They expected a challenging academic experience because that was what they were told by their peers, and that was precisely what they experienced. Despite the concerns in the literature and the JLARC study, this particular group found the courses to be on a higher level than their traditional high school courses. They reported increased work requirements, more time needed to complete the work, and additional writing expectations—in other words, a rigorous collegiate experience.

These experiences illustrated their evolving feelings about their ability to do college-level work. The students in the study indicated that the instruction in their dual enrollment courses was different than their other high school courses. Those differences contributed to an overall feeling of being better prepared for college after high school. For the students with doubts about their academic strengths, this is a positive finding, and is supported by other research on dual enrollment outcomes.

The students in the study comprised a mix of those who had no firm post-secondary plans and those who entered high school on a college-bound path. Those who expected to go to college after high school found that dual enrollment provided an opportunity to test the waters, accumulate some college credits, and get ahead of their peers. It is likely that this group of students would have attended college even if there had been no dual enrollment options for them in high school. However, the confidence boost that came with completing challenging collegiate-level work showed in their responses both in terms of academic ability and of handling the workload. When they arrived on the campus of VACC, they had clear and realistic expectations

of what lay ahead of them. For the first-generation students and the non-first-generation students, their dual enrollment experience provided a feeling of assurance that they would be successful.

For the undecided students, the impact was more dramatic. Diane, in particular, felt like she was lost in high school. Unhappy, acting out, and aimless, she allowed her counselor to enroll her in two dual enrollment courses. The college algebra course was an unmitigated disaster, earning her a permanent F on her college transcript. Despite that, something happened in her ENG 111 College Composition course that changed everything for her. At the time of our interview, she was finishing her last semester with plans to transfer this fall. Her experience was so valuable it changed her post-secondary trajectory.

The final theme investigated the value of dual enrollment as a supporting factor when making post-secondary plans. A 2013 study identified gaps in college enrollment plans for students in a large urban school district with a minority majority population and 92% of students receiving free or reduced lunch (Stephan & Rosenbaum). The gaps existed between general plans and specific plans to attend college, and between specific plans and actual enrollment (Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). Despite 80% of high school seniors articulating a general plan to enroll in college in the fall, only 62% of them could name the college they planned to attend. The study found that although many students plan to attend college, they do not take the specific actions necessary to enroll (Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). For the students who articulated a plan to attend college after high school, Fay, Gwen, Helen and Kate named a college. For the ones whose plans were more undecided, the value of their dual enrollment experience, including the application and enrollment processes, positively influenced their post-secondary plans.

The idea of getting a head start on college resonated with four of the students. There has been much media attention paid to the crushing student loan debt experienced by students after

graduation from college, and that message has been received by the students in the study. The idea that they could start while in high school, arrive on the community college campus ahead of first-time freshmen, and ultimately incur less debt was an influencing value factor in their dual enrollment decision-making.

The students in the study saved over \$8000 by participating in dual enrollment in high school. This was \$8000 that they didn't borrow, and also \$8000 that didn't involve Federal financial aid, leaving their full financial aid benefit available to them upon matriculating to the community college. Even though the savings were minimal on a per-student basis, \$356.00 for students who dual enrolled in one course, the feeling of getting a head start resonated with them in more than just financial terms. They felt ahead of their peers, and that was a powerful and influential factor in their dual enrollment experience.

In a national study, An (2013) found that racial minority students who participated in dual enrollment were 6.1% more likely to attain a bachelor's degree and 6.5% more likely to enroll in a four-year institution than their non-dual enrolled peers. Despite the efforts of educational policymakers to see dual enrollment as a means to close the educational and opportunity gap for minority students (Nelson & Waltz, 2019), underlying these policy efforts is the belief that dual enrollment increases equity and access by introducing students to post-secondary opportunities (Miller, Kosiewicz, Wang, Marwah, Delhommer, & Daugherty, 2017). Dual enrollment acts as an academic transition to college, since the students have performed at the college level and understand college expectations (Rivera, Kotok, & Ashby, 2019). Despite the research, the literature and the policymaking efforts, the racial gap in Virginia is wide and persistent. For the students in the study, the efforts of the policymakers were not reaching them. The message reverberates among higher education practitioners and policymakers but does not

trickle down to high school counselors, parents, and students. Even though dual enrollment is now offered at more high schools than Advanced Placement courses (Rivera et al., 2019), none of the study participants reported it being well-known, commonly understood, or widely used by their peers. Further, the students reported a perception that dual enrollment courses contain mostly White students. Gwen shared that her friends who were African American felt they would not be accepted into dual enrollment courses because they were predominantly White. She felt that her peers avoided dual enrollment because they did not want to be in classes with students they didn't like. Gwen felt there was some racial tension at her school, and her African American friends didn't see the need for dual enrollment if they were not planning on attending a four-year college anyway.

Unanticipated Findings

Once the students in the study had settled on the idea of participating in dual enrollment, they reported the potential to improve their GPA as a benefit. This idea of using dual enrollment as a mechanism to improve a grade point average is not a phenomenon that has been previously reported in the literature. While there is evidence that students who have participated in dual enrollment in high school have higher GPAs in college (Allen & Dadgar, 2012), the deliberate use of a weighted dual enrollment class to either make up for earlier poor performance or to strengthen an already-strong academic record has not been reported. The implication of this theme is that students who are not confident academically may use a rigorous college course as a means to raise their GPA and, in the process, raise their confidence in their academic ability. Even when other students pointed out the risks of such a tactic, as was mentioned by Fay, the students judged the choice to be worth the risk. For Diane, who failed a math course but thrived

in her English course, that success was enough to propel her on to community college, where she completed five semesters successfully and graduated this spring.

Many students, like a few in the study, start high school without understanding the importance of their academic record for college-going decisions. By the time many realize it, the damage to their high school GPA may be too great to overcome. The risks of taking rigorous dual enrollment and/or Advanced Placement (AP) courses might even further aggravate a student's record. The GPA result, therefore, was unexpected and interesting in light of its potential to motivate students with less academic confidence to consider themselves in new ways.

Implications for Action

The dual enrollment structure in Virginia is in a unique position to effect positive change. Each year, community colleges and school divisions sign dual enrollment contracts that outline the responsibilities of each, as well as those of the students. With the introduction of the NACEP standards into the contracts, longstanding concerns over quality and rigor are being systematically addressed. These contracts are signed by both the college president and the school division superintendents and present a unique opportunity share the implications of dual enrollment participation for all students in terms of success outcomes. Superintendents set the agenda for and the culture of the school division. The extent to which they can be made aware of how important this dual enrollment opportunity is, which already exists and needs only the critical element of awareness to be more widely utilized, the better the outcomes for students regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or gender. Community Colleges would be wise to share with superintendents their overall enrollment data, success data, and post-secondary data that show how dual enrollment is impacting their students. Superintendent buy-in is critical to reach

the group most likely to directly impact dual enrollment participation decisions: high school guidance counselors.

When considering these results, the second most important group to reach are high school guidance counselors. They provide the clearest path to improving dual enrollment participation among all students, including African Americans. Outreach to this group can take many forms, invitations to the community college campus for presentations and tours, counselor outreach events in the high schools, newsletters, data reports, and the possibilities are extensive to increase awareness among counselors, so they can provide it to students. A group of high school counselors was invited to share their insights into why more African American students do not participate in dual enrollment, and they identified themselves, citing their varied degrees of understanding, misconceptions about how community college credits transfer, and low expectations for students. While the first two could be addressed through professional development, stronger relationships, and regular data-sharing, the last misconception is more troubling and requires immediate attention. However, this group of educators is charged with providing information and options to students throughout their secondary experience. They have access to the students, and they need knowledge about how dual enrollment positively impacts students to inform their behavior and communication when counseling students. Superintendents who are proponents of dual enrollment, including it in their overall strategy for their student body, communicate that expectation throughout the school division. With strategic, focused emphasis in this area on the part of community colleges, Virginia could begin the process of reducing the inequities in dual enrollment participation among African American high school students.

Implications for Future Research

Nationally, there is a heightened focus on education outcomes and completion rates, with dual enrollment emerging as a tool to assist in improving these metrics (Hoffman, 2012). This focus, in turn, has led to performance-based funding models and legislative interest in dual enrollment. Therefore, empirical research is necessary to guide and inform policy for dual enrollment programs. With the current research showing dual enrollment participation is a viable means of reducing socioeconomic gaps in student educational attainment (An, 2013; Ganzert, 2012), more needs to be learned about how expanding the opportunity for dual enrollment to the students can increase college-going rates, success in college, and college completion. Any program that supports and eases students' transitions into post-secondary education has significant economic benefits and must be thoroughly studied and understood to realize the broadest possible participation. Educators at all levels, along with legislators and other stakeholders, have a vested interest in ensuring the benefits of dual enrollment students are available and accessible equitably to all student populations.

This study sought to understand how the experience of participation in dual enrollment impacted decision making about college. There are several areas that are ripe for further exploration, including how counselors present dual enrollment opportunities to students, the awareness of dual enrollment programs in the African American high school student population, and research into the high school experiences of African American students in high schools with large dual enrollment programs who elected not to participate in them. Further qualitative research on the experiences of African American students in high school contributes to replication and provides additional insights into the lived experiences of a group of students who

are vital to the continued success of the nation, but who are missing out on a program that has consistently been shown to benefit students.

Dual enrollment is at an interesting point in its history in Virginia. The attention it recently received from the legislature will impact how much it costs and how well it transfers to four-year institutions. Tuition cost, in particular, may have significant impacts on the number of students who are able to participate. Research that leads to understanding why African American students are participating at lower levels can illuminate strategies to raise participation rates. This study did not intend to look at gender difference among the students, but college-going rates for African American males have always lagged those for females, and the potential exists for increased participation in dual enrollment by African American males to lead to increased college-going rates for that population as well.

Further research on the role of high school counselors would be beneficial to better understand how they perceive dual enrollment and what part they think it does or should play in the high school experience. While the impact of parents is very obvious, providing professional development to high school counselors is much more easily accomplished and may be a source of widening the pathway to dual enrollment for more students, particularly African American students.

Conclusion

African American high school students participate in dual enrollment at much lower rates than White students, thereby not receiving the significant benefits that accrue from taking college level courses in high school. Earlier in this study, an old quotation was used from the 1980s report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*. It was a deliberate choice because, despite decades of attempts at education reform, the nation is as much

at risk as ever, perhaps more so since so many attempts at reform have failed to deliver results.

This study dealt with African American students because that is the largest minority in the region in the study. Despite regional and national challenges with quality and rigor, dual enrollment has demonstrated that it does increase students' success across racial and socio-economic lines.

This study examined 11 African American students who participated in dual enrollment in high school and have matriculated to community college within the past four semesters. The students shared how others influenced their decision to dual enroll, both positively and negatively. They introduced a new concept into the literature, the notion of dual enrollment as a tool to improve high school GPA. They faced some challenges in enrolling, notably taking a high-stakes placement test, yet they persisted. These were the overarching themes that addressed the first research focus on what influenced the students to take this path.

The students expected the dual enrollment courses to be difficult, and their expectations were met. For both academically confident and non-confident students, the experience was a significant challenge that, by meeting it, increased their overall confidence in their academic abilities and readiness for college. Only two students had no plans for college after high school, but that did not mean the other students had definitive plans. Four were able to name a college to which they aspired. For the two students with no plans for college, the value of the dual enrollment experience was the deciding factor. For the two who articulated vague plans, dual enrollment led them to VACC, where they already had credit and were ahead of their peers. For the students who had a specific college in mind, dual enrollment exposed them to VACC, which they ultimately chose as the mechanism to transfer to their institution of choice.

It is certainly possible that these students would have ultimately enrolled at VACC anyway. However, their accounts describe an experience that included overcoming obstacles,

stepping outside their comfort zones, going where they might not feel like they belonged, and rising to the challenge of difficult coursework. The confidence gained from each of these separate accomplishments created a singular experience that points to dual enrollment as a valuable experience in college-going decision making. While the students sought dual enrollment for different reasons, they all perceived that they were better prepared after the experience. All of the 11 are planning to transfer to four-year institutions.

Understanding why these African American students participated in dual enrollment has implications for encouraging others to do so. Promoting the GPA factor and the notion of getting a head start is an easy beginning. Developing strategies to minimize the stress of the placement test, such as providing practice opportunities, may minimize that barrier for some students. For colleges fortunate enough to have Career Coaches in high schools, more efforts on early post-secondary planning that includes dual enrollment would lead to increased dual enrollment participation. Developing stronger relationships between community colleges and high school guidance departments may encourage more counselors to urge more diverse groups of students to consider dual enrollment.

The community college mission is noble in its intent to provide access to higher education for all who can benefit from it. But open doors are not enough if significant portions of the population are not walking through. Dual enrollment has shown through myriad studies to positively impact student outcomes across race, gender and socioeconomic status. With such evidence in hand, practitioners have the tool; now they need to raise awareness by communicating the message to parents, counselors, and students in order to equitably meet the needs of this critical portion of the population.

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APPENDICES

A - Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment Between Virginia Public Schools and Community Colleges MARCH 2008

Broadly speaking, dual enrollment allows high school students to meet the requirements for high school graduation while simultaneously earning college credit. National research has demonstrated that dual enrollment is a vehicle for increasing post-secondary participation rates. The Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment gives a state-wide framework for dual enrollment arrangements between the public schools and community colleges. These arrangements may be made at the local level, i.e., between the representatives of boards of the participating public school and the participating community college authorized to contract such agreements. These arrangements may be formed in three distinct ways. First, high school students may be enrolled in the regularly scheduled college credit courses with the other students taught at the community college. Second, high school students may be enrolled in specially scheduled college credit courses conducted exclusively for high school students taught at the high school. Third, high school students may be enrolled in specially scheduled college credit courses conducted exclusively for high school students taught at the community college. In the latter two cases where the college credit courses are specially scheduled for the high school students, these courses shall have the same academic rigor as the regularly scheduled college credit courses and meet all of the college accreditation standards. In all cases, the particular courses to be offered shall be determined through the mutual agreement of the participating public school and community college. Some colleges and school divisions may choose to also enter into partnerships whereby validated course credits are awarded to high school students. These validated credit arrangements must follow accepted VCCS guidelines and be agreed upon by both the college and the school division.

Purpose

The purpose of the Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment is to provide a wider range of course options for high school students in academic and career/occupational-technical subject areas where appropriate. As such, the plan promotes rigorous educational pursuits and encourages learning as a lifelong process. It recognizes that high school students who accrue college credit are more likely to continue with their education beyond high school than those who do not. The plan also offers a direct cost benefit to the Commonwealth of Virginia, especially as it avoids the unnecessary duplication of facilities and equipment when students receive credit towards a post-secondary credential while enrolled in high school.

Collaboration Between Community Colleges and Public School Divisions

Dual enrollment agreements are partnerships between secondary and postsecondary entities, both of whom play essential roles in the educational pipeline. As such, the community college and public school division will collaborate to identify need and select dual enrollment course offerings available to students. Further, the community college will identify a coordinator of dual enrollment to serve as a liaison to the high school, whose responsibilities shall include offering informational sessions to high school students and their parents and facilitating meetings between college and high school stakeholders to discuss logistics.

Student Eligibility

Dual enrollment coursework is restricted to high school juniors and seniors. Exceptions may be considered for freshman and sophomore students who are able to demonstrate readiness for college level coursework through the colleges' established institutional policies. It is required that all freshman and sophomore students meet established institutional placement criteria prior to enrolling in dual enrollment coursework. Appropriate public school and community college officials should take the necessary steps to assure that every student who is registered under the dual enrollment arrangement is amply prepared for the demands of a college-level course and can benefit from the enrichment opportunity.

Admissions Requirements

The Virginia Board of Education *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* govern the student's participation in dual enrollment arrangements. First, the public school principal must approve the cross- registration of the high school student to the community college. Second, the community college must accept the high school student for admission to the college-level course. All Virginia Community College System and institutional placement criteria must be met by the student prior to enrolling in a dual enrollment course. The community college will assume responsibility for administering the placement test to students recommended for dual enrollment courses, and for registering students in the courses.

Course Eligibility

Courses may be drawn from all the college subject areas. The courses must be offered for college credit and must meet course enrollment requirements at the community college. The community college has the responsibility to ensure that all dual enrollment courses taught are equivalent to other instruction offered by the college, specifically in terms of course objectives, components of the syllabi, level and rigor of content, evaluation of students, textbooks, student outcomes and assessment, and faculty evaluation.

Compliance with Accreditation Standards

The Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment complies with all the criteria of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and with the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*.

Credit Awarded

College credit shall be awarded by the community college to the participating high school students upon successful completion of the course. The award shall be in compliance with appropriate accrediting standards for community colleges.

High school credit also shall be awarded to the participating high school students upon successful completion of the course. The award shall be in compliance with state standards.

Selection of Faculty

The faculty shall be selected and employed by the participating community college and shall meet the faculty hiring criteria established by SACS and the State Board for Community Colleges. For credentialing guidelines, the SACS' criteria state, "Faculty teaching associate degree courses designed for transfer to a baccalaureate degree: doctor's or master's degree in the teaching discipline or master's degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline)."

If a part-time faculty member of the community college is employed simultaneously full-time by the public school, the college may reimburse the public school board for the services of its faculty member in lieu of direct compensation to the faculty member. Alternate faculty compensation plans may be negotiated by the participating community college and public school.

Tuition and Fees

According to the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, the public school will not be penalized in its state appropriation for developing and implementing dual enrollment. Schools and colleges are encouraged to provide high school students the opportunity for dual enrollment at no tuition cost to them or their families. In addition, neither the public school nor the community college shall be penalized in state appropriations it receives for developing and implementing the dual enrollment arrangement. The public school shall receive average daily membership (ADM) credit for its students who participate in the dual enrollment arrangement, and the community college shall receive full-time equivalent (FTE) student credit for the participating high school students.

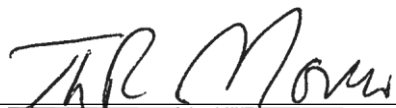
Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment has long been recognized in Virginia as an important aspect of an effective instructional program. In this spirit, all dual enrollment arrangements developed and implemented under the auspices of the Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment shall include a formal mechanism to assess faculty effectiveness and student success. The community college has the responsibility to ensure that all dual enrollment courses taught are equivalent to other instruction

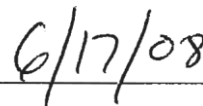
offered by the college, specifically in terms of course objectives, components of the syllabi, level and rigor of content, evaluation of students, textbooks, student outcomes and assessment, and faculty evaluation.

Student and faculty evaluations are an integral component of the assessment process for a college course. The Commission on Colleges Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) states, within its document *Principles of Accreditation*, that an institution should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status. Part of the faculty evaluation process should include student evaluation of faculty effectiveness.

- (1) Faculty Evaluation: The community college will conduct faculty evaluations for dual enrollment instructors using the college guidelines adopted for all adjunct faculty. A copy of the evaluation results will be submitted to the designated school division representative.
- (2) Student evaluations on all dual enrollment adjunct instructors will be conducted each semester for each course offered through the dual enrollment program. Results of the student evaluations will be compiled and shared with the Dean, Program Lead, faculty member, and designated school division representative.

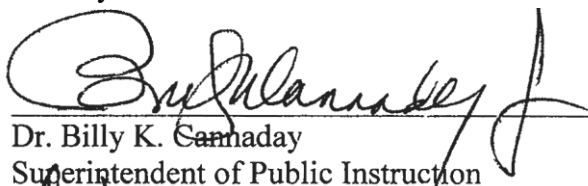


Dr. Thomas Morris

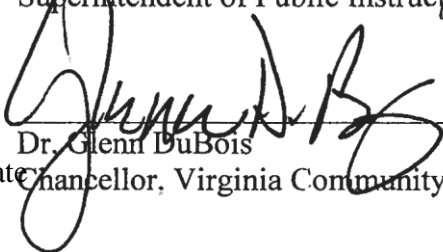


Secretary of Education

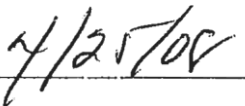
Date



Dr. Billy K. Camaday
Superintendent of Public Instruction



Dr. Glenn DuBois
Date Chancellor, Virginia Community College System



**B - Governing Principles for Dual Enrollment between Virginia's Public Schools and the
Virginia Community College System**

AUGUST 2015

The *Governing Principles for Dual Enrollment between Virginia Public Schools and the Virginia Community College System* exist to provide a state-wide framework for successful, quality dual enrollment partnerships between public schools and community colleges. As such the Principles encourage rigorous educational pursuits; promote a wider range of course options for high school students; and advance access to and success in higher education and the workplace. In addition, because dual enrollment allows high school students to meet the requirements for high school graduation while simultaneously earning college credit, time is saved and the duplication of facilities and equipment is avoided, both of which have a positive economic impact on the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The benefits of dual enrollment programs are well-known. Dual enrollment programs expose high school students to rigorous coursework and prepare them for the academic and behavioral expectations of colleges and universities. High school students participating in dual enrollment programs have increased motivation and engage deeply with their learning, promoting a smoother college transition and increased chances of long-term academic success. Students who have participated in a dual enrollment program have higher high school graduation and college enrollment rates. When in college, these students have higher persistence and retention rates as well as higher GPAs. The acquisition of dual enrollment credits decreases the time required to complete a college degree resulting in significant cost savings.

These Governing Principles align with the Code of Virginia, which recognizes community colleges as the primary providers of college education for high school students in the Commonwealth; with State Council for Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) policy; with Virginia Department of Education (VDoE) policy; and with all policies, standards and requirements set forth by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Dual Enrollment faculty and students shall be bound by these Governing Principles.

For the purpose of this document, dual enrollment refers to community college coursework taken by high school students under the aegis of an agreement between a public school or public school division and a VCCS college wherein a student takes college-level coursework that counts towards high school graduation and is designed to result in earned college credits. High school students may elect to pursue one of several dual enrollment pathways. Students may take dual enrollment courses to enhance the rigor of their high school coursework but without deliberately seeking a post-secondary credential. Qualified students may choose a pathway that provides the opportunity to complete a certificate or an associate of arts or an associate of science degree and take courses that will transfer to post-secondary colleges and universities. Students may choose to enroll in a career technical educational pathway that provides the opportunity to complete a certificate or an associate in applied science degree during or after high school that leads to entry into the workforce. In all cases the community college shall maintain institutional control of the courses and ensure curricular integrity.

These pathways represent working partnerships between community colleges and the public school divisions and shall be developed at the local level between the public school division and the individual community colleges authorized to contract such agreements. All such agreements, the plans for implementation, and the specific dual enrollment options and pathways provided to students shall comply with these Governing Principles and, as dictated by the Code of Virginia, be submitted by the institutions to the Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System and the Superintendent of Public Instruction annually.

Student Eligibility and Admission Requirements

The *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* (8 VAC 20-131), adopted by the Virginia Board of Education, governs and encourages student participation in dual enrollment arrangements under the following specified conditions:

- Written approval of the high school principal prior to participation in dual enrollment must be obtained;
- The college must accept the high school student for admission to the course or courses; and
- The course or courses must be offered by the college for degree credits (no remedial courses will be offered).

Colleges may offer admission to public and private high school juniors and seniors and home school students studying at the high school junior and senior levels, provided they are college ready according to VCCS policy.¹ Because admitting freshmen and sophomores is considered exceptional, the college-ready status of each prospective freshman and sophomore student will be treated on a case-by-case basis. Formal approval by the college president is required for admitting a ninth or tenth grade high school student. Home school students must provide a copy of a home school agreement approved by the school district or a letter from the local school board or a copy of the letter filed by the parent or legal guardian declaring home school for religious exemption. Documentation of parental permission is required for all dual enrollment students.

All dual enrollment students must demonstrate readiness for college through placement testing or appropriate scores on the SAT, ACT, or PSAT. Students enrolling in a dual enrollment course must meet all college course pre-requisites. The community college shall assume responsibility, either on campus or at another location approved by the college, for administrative oversight of placement testing and registering students.

Dual enrollment students must be registered by the end of the add/drop period established for each course; exceptions must be approved by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Services and

¹ Colleges are encouraged to apply these principles to private high school dual enrollment offerings and home school dual enrollment students. In all cases community colleges shall maintain institutional control of the dual enrollment courses and ensure curricular integrity of those courses.

Research. Dual enrolled courses taught at the high school may not include non-dual enrolled students without the documented approval of the community college president.

Student Support Services

In order to support the dual enrolled student's collegial experience, the community college shall provide dual enrollment students access to appropriate student support programs, academic support services, and activities including access and user privileges to adequate library collections and services and any other learning information or resources.

Dual Enrollment Faculty

Selection of Faculty

Faculty shall be selected by the participating community college and shall meet the faculty qualification guidelines established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and the State Board for Community Colleges policies. When determining faculty qualifications, an institution considers the highest earned degree in the discipline and related work. The following guidelines shall be used:

- Faculty members teaching associate degree courses designed for transfer to a baccalaureate degree have earned a doctorate or master's degree in the teaching discipline or master's degree with a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline.
- Faculty members teaching associate degree courses not designed for transfer to the baccalaureate degree have earned a bachelor's degree in the teaching discipline or associate's degree in the teaching field with demonstrated competencies in the teaching discipline and two years of occupational experience.
- Faculty members teaching non-associate's degree occupational programs have earned a high school diploma or equivalent, associate or equivalent in the teaching field preferred, and five years of current occupational experience as defined by the State Board for Community Colleges.

Faculty Responsibility

Dual enrollment faculty shall conform to all college and departmental responsibilities, policies, and procedures related to dual enrollment courses. The faculty member shall:

- Prepare and disseminate a college-approved course syllabus that includes all required information for the college course, including the college's grading scale;
- Adhere to the required number of instructional/contact hours for the course;

- Adhere to established college academic/instructional calendars for enrollment and grade submission;
- Use college-approved instructional materials;
- Incorporate all student learning outcomes and assessment of student learning outcomes into instruction;
- Participate in student evaluation of instructional effectiveness;
- Submit final course grades; and
- Participate in required meetings and professional development opportunities.

Curriculum Standards

Dual enrollment courses shall be offered for college credit with the same departmental designations, course descriptions, numbers, titles, and credits as those listed in the VCCS Master Course File. All dual enrollment courses shall be equivalent to the pedagogical, theoretical, and philosophical orientation of the community college department and contain the same student learning outcomes, components of the syllabi, level and rigor of content, assessment and evaluation of student learning outcomes, and instructional effectiveness.

Evaluation

An effective dual enrollment program requires collaboration between public schools and community colleges to evaluate student learning outcomes, program learning outcomes, instructional effectiveness, and longitudinal outcomes. This evaluative process shall be coordinated by the community college with support from the public school to implement and collect information and data in a timely manner. The following guiding principles establish expectations for the community colleges and public schools regarding the evaluation of the dual enrollment program.

Student Learning Outcomes

In order to ensure that dual enrollment courses taught at the high school meet the curricular depth and breadth of courses taught on community college campuses, all dual enrollment courses shall have the same student learning outcomes ~~equivalent to~~ as those courses taught on campus. In addition student learning outcomes in all dual enrollment courses shall be assessed using common assessment measures identified and approved by the college and utilized in courses taught on campus. All course learning outcomes shall be communicated to students.

Program Learning Outcomes

Where applicable, the community college's assessment of program learning outcomes shall include dual enrollment students.

Instructional Effectiveness

The community college shall conduct evaluations of dual enrollment instructors using college guidelines established for all adjunct or full-time faculty. High school faculty or adjunct faculty employed by the community college teaching a dual enrollment course shall be evaluated in accordance with the college's adjunct faculty evaluation process. Full-time community college faculty teaching a dual enrollment course shall be evaluated in accordance with the college's full-time faculty evaluation process.

Part of the evaluation of instructional effectiveness shall include student evaluation of faculty effectiveness. Student evaluation of faculty effectiveness shall be conducted each semester for each course offered in the dual enrollment program and use the same instruments used for all adjunct or full-time faculty. Results of the student evaluations of teaching effectiveness shall be compiled and shared with the academic dean or designee, the faculty member, and the designated public school representative.

Evaluation of Longitudinal Outcomes

Community colleges and public schools divisions shall work together to provide tracking data on the performance of dual enrollment students, including credits completed, college courses attempted and completed, cumulative GPA, high school graduation data, and any other data agreed upon. The specific data elements will be reported by the community college on a regular basis.

Continuous Improvement

In order to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the dual enrollment program, the community college will specify and evaluate dual enrollment programmatic outcomes and identify changes intended to result in continuous improvement.

Financial Issues

Public school divisions and community colleges should provide the opportunity for students to participate in dual enrollment at little or no cost to them or their families. Virginia Community College System (VCCS) policy requires that full tuition and fees be paid to community colleges for each student in every dual enrollment course. However, a college may reimburse a public school division a portion of tuition in recognition of the school division's contribution of resources toward student participation in the dual enrollment program:

- In accordance with the VCCS Dual Enrollment Financial Model, community colleges will reimburse school divisions *when dual enrollment courses are offered in the high school and are taught by a qualified high school faculty member*. The minimum amount of tuition that will be reimbursed is 60% of tuition charged. The reimbursement rate can be increased up to 100% of the tuition charged based on specific options negotiated by the community college and public school division. Total reimbursement may not exceed 100% of the tuition charged. School divisions may not charge dual enrollment students or their families more than the actual cost of the tuition and fees charged. Reimbursement

rates and justifications shall be documented in the annual dual enrollment contract between the community college and the school division.

- When dual enrollment courses are not taught by high school faculty members, the community college may, in order to reduce the net cost to students, reimburse the school division a portion of tuition in recognition of agreed-to contributions of resources provided by the school division.

Neither the school division nor the community college will be penalized in its state appropriation for implementing dual enrollment programs. Public schools shall receive average daily membership (ADM) credit for their students participating in these programs, and the community college shall receive full-time equivalent (FTE) credits for high school students participating in dual enrollment.

In accordance with VCCS policy, tuition shall be charged at the Virginia in-state rate for any high school student not otherwise qualified for in-state tuition who is enrolled in courses specifically designed as part of the high school curriculum in a community college for which the student may, upon successful completion, receive high school and community college credit pursuant to a dual enrollment agreement between the high school and the community college. In addition, a capital fee shall not be charged to any out-of-state dual enrolled student.

C - Initial Participant Request Email

Subject: Participate in Dual Enrollment Research!

Dear (Student Name)

Because you completed college level courses in high school, you have been selected to participate in a research study! I am interested in talking with you about your experience taking college courses while in high school and how that may have influenced your decisions to attend college. **I wouldn't take more than an hour of your time, and I will give you a \$25 gift card at the conclusion of the interview.**

If you are willing to participate, please reply to this email and I will give you some additional information. I would love to hear about your experiences as a dual enrollment student! I hope you will consider participating in the research.

Best regards,

Kris Rarig

D - Follow-Up Email

Dear [Student Name]

Thank you for your response to my request to interview you for my research study! I look forward to meeting you.

My dissertation is about the African American student experience in dual enrollment. I am interested in understanding what influenced you to participate in dual enrollment while in high school and how that experience influenced you to attend college. The interview will consist of semi-structured questions and last approximately one hour. **All information about you will remain strictly confidential and no personally identifiable information will be included in my dissertation.** I will provide you with a copy of the transcription of the interview to ensure that your responses are captured accurately. Please click the link to the poll to select a date and time for your interview, which will be conducted in the Hampton III Building, Room 709C. **You will receive your \$50 gift card at that time.**

I am an administrator at VACC and have worked closely with the College's dual enrollment program for many years. I am very interested to hear your story! Thanks again! Kris Rarig

[Dual Enrollment Research Project!](#)

If none of these times are convenient, I am happy to add more dates!

Best regards, Kris Rarig

E - Interview Protocol

IV. Introductory Remarks

Hello and thank you for coming today. My name is Kris Rarig, and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. As I mentioned in my email, as a former dual enrollment student, you are being asked to participate in a research study exploring how your participation in dual enrollment influenced your college-going decision-making.

II. Purpose

You were selected to participate in today's meeting because of your experience taking a dual enrollment course in high school and now being enrolled in a community college. I am interested in your particular dual enrollment story. I'll be asking open ended questions about your school experience leading up to your first dual enrollment class, the reactions of those around you to your dual enrollment, the things that you considered when making your choice. I'm also interested in how your dual enrollment experience influenced your decision to enroll at Community College after high school.

III. Ground Rules

First, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to come here today. Before we begin, I want to cover some expectations:

- You have been asked here to share your opinions, impressions, doubts, attitudes, beliefs and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Today's discussion will be audio-recorded to ensure that I have an accurate report of

what was said. Although we will refer to each other by name during the discussion, your confidentiality is ensured. Your name will be removed from all transcripts of today's conversation, and you will not be identified by name in any reports or documents.

Before we begin the interview, I would like to explain the Informed Consent Form. [Hand out consent form.] It outlines the purpose of the study and your rights as a participant. If you feel uncomfortable with any aspect of the study, you may decline to participate in the study without penalty. [Go over consent form.] You may also leave our conversation at any time. The top copy of the form is yours to keep; please sign and return the bottom copy. Do you have any questions before we continue?

IV. Questions

Rapport-Building Questions

- Tell me about where you went to high school.
- What was the best and worst thing about high school for you?

Today, I want to hear your thoughts about dual enrollment courses. When you were in high school, you took [list courses].

- How did you learn about those courses?
- What made you interested in enrollment in those courses when you could have just taken regular courses?
- How did different people around you react when they heard you were taking those courses?
Probe: Friends? Family? Counselors?
- Were there any reasons you considered NOT taking those courses?

People take these courses for all kinds of reasons. What were the most important reasons for *you* to take dual enrollment courses?

- Some people think that registering has lots of steps. Tell me what you remember about the steps you went through to take [courses].

Research Question 2: How does their experience in dual enrollment programs influence their college-going decisions-making?

- Before enrolling in [courses], what were your plans for after high school? Did those plans change by the time you graduated? If so, what changed and why?
- Did your experiences in [courses] have an impact or influence your post-high school plans? Why?

Now I want to talk about your experiences in [courses].

- Dual enrollment courses involve college-level work. Before you took the courses, what did you think the courses would be like?

- Once you started taking the courses, what were they actually like? Homework? Reading? How the teacher treated you? Student-to-student relationships? Academic expectations? Students' plans for the future?
- Did any of those experiences influence your decision to attend college after high school? Did they influence you to attend part-time or full-time? If so, how?

Open-Ended Questions:

- African American students do not participate in dual enrollment programs at the same rates as White students in the state of Virginia. Since there is no cost involved, why do you think that is? Tell more about (parts of their response) Say more about (parts of their response).

The majority of students who attend VA Community College are people of color, but in dual enrollment it's different. As a recent high school graduate, what do you think explains that?

You have mentioned your parents and/or high school counselor. Would you mind if I followed up with them by phone to get their impressions of dual enrollment?

Conclusion

- Is there anything else that you would like to add or anything I should have asked you?

F - Interview Blueprint

	Influences on DE Participation in HS	Influences on College-going Decision-making
Awareness	Q1, Q2, Q3	
Interest	Q4	
Reaction	Q5, Q6,	
Action	Q7	
Plans		Q9
Experience	Q14, Q15	Q8, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q14, Q15
Decision		Q13

G - Introduction of Participants

Andy elected to enroll in Criminal Justice dual enrollment courses while in high school because his mother works in law enforcement. He reported that the experience convinced him that he did not want to continue in that career path, despite it being one of the most enriching courses he took. The class involved a field trip to FBI headquarters, and a final exam where the class was divided into two groups, one to create an intricate crime scene and the other to solve the crime. He was animated and expansive in his description of the experience. Andy expressed to his high school counselor that he wanted to go to college, but he was unsure on where he might go. He later learned about dual enrollment from a high school career coach who told him about the community college and that he could get a head start on attending there through dual enrollment. While the ADJ course did not ignite a career choice, it made him feel like he was ahead of his peers, and that made him feel good. Andy is in his first year at VACC

Ben was born in Jamaica and moved to the area at the beginning of his junior year. A strong student in Jamaica, his GPA was calculated differently here and was lower than it had been. Expressing dissatisfaction with the lower GPA, he made the decision to dual enroll specifically to boost this grade point average. Ben felt his school in Jamaica was more college-preparatory than his new high school, so he made deliberate choices to enroll in AP and DE courses. Ben believed the dual enrollment course and other advanced courses would be hard, but he was unprepared to the workload, causing his parents to be concerned about his lack of sleep. He ultimately over-committed to advanced classes and ended up dropping an honors English course.

Carly is a soft-spoken young woman with thoughts about health professions but undecided about which avenue to pursue. She reported a 'great' high school experience full of

fun and friends. After an honors class proved too easy, she sought out more challenging AP and DE classes. Her entire friend 'crew' were also AP and DE inclined and she shared that her parents were proud of her for taking advanced classes. Carly was in her second semester at VACC at the time of the interview and had hopes of completing an associate's degree and transferring to Old Dominion University.

Diane had a rough high school experience full of struggle and trouble. She was bullied and consequently got in a lot of physical fights in school. Her mother became ill when she was a junior and she felt that prevented her from being focused. She also believed that it might be too late to undo the damage done to her grades in ninth and tenth grade. Diane learned about dual enrollment at a high school assembly and decided to go for it. She was intrigued by the idea of getting college and high school credit at the same time, and surprised that she was able to do well enough on the placement test to get into a college level math course. The math course was not a success and Diane ultimately failed it, but the English course made such an impression that she decided she did want to go to college after high school. Diane was in her final semester at VACC when interviewed and looking forward to commencement.

Emma felt that a low point in her high school career was having to adjust to the college curriculum in the three dual enrollment classes she was in. Nevertheless, she was also identified the high point as meeting people like the professors. Emma is very interested in computer science and hopes to go to Virginia Tech. Her dual enrollment experience refined her plans from computer science to computer engineering. Emma took such a heavy load of DE and AP classes her junior year that she elected not to take any her senior year. She felt like she had a nice amount of college credit, that she attributes to saving time and money, and she felt more solid in

her choices of what she wanted to do after high school. Emma was two semesters from transferring at the time of the interview.

Fay struggled with some health challenges early in her high school career and finished her sophomore year feeling like colleges weren't going to look favorably on her academic record to date. She decided to dual enroll mostly because of the no-cost aspect of it. She felt like dual enrollment 'put her foot in the water' and that made her think college was something she definitely wanted to do. Emma's peers weren't fans of this plan and told her it would take all her time and stress her out. They also told her it would sink her GPA, which she felt was a reason more of her peers weren't in dual enrollment classes. Emma felt that dual enrollment was a better option for her than AP, because she worried she would do all the work and at the end not score well enough on the test to get college credit. She was one class away from finishing her associate's when interviewed and planned to go to VCU in the fall.

Gwen had a sister away at college who told tales of parties and college life that made Gwen feel like she would be completely overwhelmed if she were to attempt it. She had a tough patch in high school, and did some damage to her GPA, so she was thinking that the military or straight to work might be a better option. Then she met another student in a biology class who told her about dual enrollment. She wasn't sure she could, but decided to give it a try and ultimately completed Freshman Composition I and II with Bs. For Emma, staying near to home for now makes better sense. She did feel self-conscious about community college since many of her friends went straight to four-year institutions, but when she did tell them, they said they wish they'd gone that route because they were away at college and didn't know what to do. Gwen has been attending VACC part time and hopes to be accepted to the theater program at VCU.

Helen transferred from a school that was 72% White to one that was 87% White in the same district. She described a specific instance where her guidance counselor said that Helen was coming off as better than the other African American students because of her parents' income level, her clothing, and because she was smart. Helen's father angrily ended the conference, but Helen still felt for a while that she should dumb herself down and she didn't want to take dual enrollment courses. Later, she felt like the same counselor didn't mean to share information about dual enrollment, but Helen told her that she could do it, and she did. After that, Helen didn't see this particular counselor, she went to her "White friends' counselor".

Ian went to the Virginia Beach Aquarium in the fifth grade and has wanted to be a marine biologist ever since. The only problem is, he also loves music. Ian is realistic about his chances of making a living at a music career, but he was thinking of musical arrangement and sound engineering as a possibility. Ian's dad told him he had two choices after high school: college or the military. Ian considered the Coast Guard an option, but overall thought college would suit him better. Ian was just starting his college career at the time of the interview and was still exploring various options.

Julia was unique in the sample because she was very unsure about what classes she took and what grades she got. She did not remember any part of the application or enrollment process. She found out after enrolling at VACC that she had received credit for two courses while in high school. Julia had a sister who was dual enrolled in English courses and seemed more knowledgeable about her sister's experience than her own. She is currently studying business and hopes to transfer to Old Dominion University.

Kate felt that dual enrollment proved college isn't going to be so hard because she was already doing it while still in high school. She reported that the reason she wanted to try dual

enrollment was so it would help her understand what college is really like and that would make her more prepared than the average new student. Kate remembers her high school peers saying they didn't know if they would go to college because they didn't know what it would be like. For her, dual enrollment was the leg up that gave her the confidence she wanted. At the time of the interview, Kate had completed one associate's degree but was about to complete a second because it only needed six additional credits. She is headed to William and Mary this fall.

H - Development of Themes

The interviews resulted in 10-15 pages of transcription for each interview. These were broken down in different ways. One master list contained every response from the students. This list was then separated out so that the responses to each question were listed together. The master list provided a record of the totality of the experiences. The student responses grouped by question assisted with the identification of emerging themes.

Significant Statements. At the conclusion of each interview, the audio was transcribed by a transcription service. The researcher began the analysis by several casual readings through the interviews. This was followed by highlighting repeated words and phrases. By reading slowly and deliberately through the transcripts and the field notes, a list of significant statements was developed. At this initial step in the research, each statement was given equal weight, with the goal of building a comprehensive list of non-repeating non-overlapping statements. This process, beginning with large categories of distinct text, is known as horizontalization (Hays & Singh, 2013). All of the student statements were copied into a spreadsheet and examined, reviewed, and reduced to a single set of statements. The researcher ultimately identified 384 distinct, unique statements from the interviews.

Table 9

Selected Examples of Significant Statements and Emerging Themes

Coded Language	Significant Statement	Emerging Theme
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Hard, difficult, more homework, work, rigor, struggle	Definitely more homework than I was accustomed to, and with the testing I definitely had to try and adjust my study skills, because I wasn't used to studying for those kinds of tests in that way.	Rigor of Coursework, expectations
	That was the first time, where I had to sit back and take several days out of the week to study, not just the night before like I was accustomed to doing.	
GPA, grade, grades	I also liked the GPA boost, because those classes were weighted compared to classes that aren't weighted at my high school.	GPA impacts
	GPA boost, definitely	
	I decided to take dual enrollment classes mainly because I wanted to boost my GPA	
Application, online admission application, forms, placement test, testing, process	Yes, the placement test was kinda nerve wracking.	Registration challenges
Friends, parents, counselors, teachers, family, siblings, peers, relatives, guidance counselor, career coach	I remember the whole class was like, "We have to take a placement test?"	Influence of others
	So I definitely think the environment that we're in and especially people such as counselors in the position that they're in, I think they have a really big effect on what path we end up going on.	
	It was first friends, and also my parents. I would say talking to my friends, like I found out about dual enrollment through some of them and talked to them about it.	

Themes. The researcher sought to better understand what influenced a sample of African American community College students to dual enroll while in high school, and how that experience influenced subsequent college-going decisions. The students responded to the interview request enthusiastically and shared their experiences willingly and openly. Their

experiences and backgrounds were all very different, including students with strong academic confidence and students with minimal confidence. The students came from different high schools and completed a variety of dual enrollment courses with grade results from A to F. Despite these differences, an immersion into the transcribed interviews and list of significant statements began to illuminate a set of themes. The identification of themes required reading and re-reading the interview data multiple times, making notes and gathering impressions for categories and possible interpretations. The first iteration of themes included nine broad concepts. Upon further reflection and review, they were winnowed further until the researcher ultimately identified five themes.

Initial Theme	Emerging Themes	Final Themes in Order
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPA • College-going Plans • Counselor Impact • Opinions of Others • Quality of Courses • Expectations of Difficulty • Challenge of Enrollment Process • Getting a Head Start • Feelings Upon Completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dual Enrollment Course Grades as Tools for Success • Perceptions of Outside Influences on Decision Making • Expectations vs. Reality for Dual Enrollment Experiences • Perceptions of Challenges Faced Upon Deciding to Dual Enroll • Dual Enrollment as a Toll to Decrease Time to Degree Attainment • Evolution of Students' Perceptions • of their preparedness for College-level work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of Outside Influences on Decision Making • Dual Enrollment Course Grades as Tools for Success • Perceptions of Challenges Faced Upon Deciding to Dual Enroll • Expectancy of Collegiate Performance • Value of College-going Experiences

Figure 4. Development of Themes

The themes were then re-ordered to correspond to the chronology of the experience and how they related to each other. The interview questions divided the students' experiences into perceptions they had prior to dual enrolling and then reflecting on how the experience influenced their decision to go to college. The themes evolved the same way, as students shared how they first learned about dual enrollment and from whom. Since none of the students reported already knowing about dual enrollment before their junior year, this theme speaks to the influence of others. How did those surrounding the students, counselors, teachers, parents, friends, siblings and peers influence their decision to take a college level course? During this awareness phase, the students learn that dual enrollment courses are weighted, similar to AP courses. They now know that there is a program available at their high school where they can not only earn college credit at no cost, but the weighted GPA can help raise or improve their overall grade point average. The students now must take a set of specific actions which involve college processes. All but one of the students was able to describe the admission and enrollment process. The students expressed no difficulties with the online admission and no challenges with a paper enrollment form, but there was angst and stress over the placement test. This is in line with current literature about high stakes testing for students. The first set of themes move the students from awareness to action, describing how they felt and what they experienced along the way. The second set of themes asked the students to reflect on their dual enrollment experiences and share how or if that experience influenced their decision to go to college. The themes relate how the students' expectations about the difficulty of the courses were realized and how that, in turn, caused their perceptions about their academic abilities and readiness to attend college to evolve. Despite the students' belief that the dual enrollment courses would be challenging, both academically confident and not academically confident students were willing to embark on a

rigorous experience. This held true whether they felt that their counselors or friends supported their choices. The not-academically confident students projected a nothing-to-lose attitude when sharing their decision to take a college level course with a lackluster high school record. Finally, did the experience influence their decision to attend college after high school? The dual enrollment experience for these students played a supporting role in their college decision making. Two students expressed no college plans and one of the two felt the experience was a decisive game-changer. The other nine students expressed some level of planning for college after high school, which were supported by their feelings of success in their dual enrollment courses. This set of themes exposes an experience where the reality of difficult coursework meets expectations and, despite the challenges, the students are able to meet them, which supports their current post-secondary plans for college.

